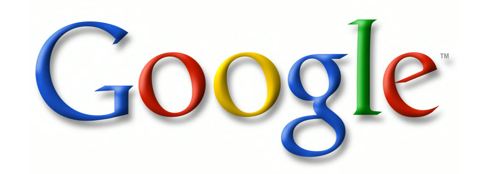


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ROSE
AND
RUE


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ROSE AND RUE.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. COMPTON READE.

"She was a maiden of most quiet face,
Tender of speech, and had no hardihood,
But was nigh feeble of her fearful blood;
Her mercy in her was so marvellous."
. . . .
SWINBURNE'S "ST. DOROTHY."

"To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
Every cubic foot of the interior swarms with the same;
Every spear of grass, the frames, limbs, organs of men and women, and all
that concerns them,
All these to me are unspeakably perfect miracles."
WALT WHITMAN'S "MIRACLES."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.





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1874.

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251. b. 332.

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ROSE AND RUE.

CHAPTER I.

WITH JUST FELT BREEZES.

SO poor Robert's second series of pleasantries at the expense of Fate did actually, you see, contrive to accomplish its destiny after a fashion, was not a quite purposeless outlay of ink, paper, red sealing-wax, money, time, and mental labour.

Tryphena posted Aunt Rachel's answer on her way to Mrs. Bond's on Monday afternoon, going through the village on purpose, the shop being then, as now, sole medium for the transaction of all postal business.

"He will be disappointed at not hearing from me, I dare say," thought the girl, as she

quitted that fastness of strange smells, "and I should have liked very well to have added just a line or two, but I could not tell if it would be right, so it was better to hold back; and that postscript says a good deal—says, I think, all that I could ever say if I were to write from now till doomsday, only in little words, and at once; but Mr. Latchet will have it that you cannot state facts too plainly—still," and a sigh. What maiden ever willingly delayed that most delicate delight, the setting forth on paper of her own foolishness, for the benefit of him who finds therein best wisdom?

However, it had to be. The unfortunate were a law unto themselves. You could not argue concerning them as about the rest of the world—the prosperous, happy, cheerful people, principally shopkeepers, who never seemed to meet with a disappointment, or be troubled with a care.

For instance, had a rich and handsome and talented young man fallen a victim to the all-conquering charms of any one of the three Misses Gregory, he would, of course, have met with the hottest encouragement. Mr. and Mrs.

Gregory would have clasped him alternately to their ample bosoms, wept, gasped, ejaculated, till reason reeled; Miss Susanna, or Miss Elizabeth, or Miss Arabella, the happy virgin on whom his choice had fallen, would have been praised, and petted, and bragged about, till her admiring friends might have felt tempted in the keenness of their anguish to fall upon her in a body, and cruelly kiss and fondle her clean out of existence.

Did Miss Baker meet with some well-to-do gentleman, who, in consideration of her many virtues, would consent to overlook the plenitude of her summers and deficiencies of her dental arrangements, what merry-making would there not ensue in the house of Baker! But when one was only a farmer's daughter, and could neither make bonnets nor keep accounts, it was a very different story.

One must, then, take facts as one found them. After all, that letter might have gone astray, like the other—and then he would never have heard from them at all, and would have thought that she meant to give him up; perhaps that she was radically incapable of cherishing an honest affection. Yes; if life

just at present were not all that it might be, it was quite possible for it to be worse. One should not give way to envy, and jealousy, and that dusky crowd of small evilnesses which follows so surely on the heels of grief; one should make the best of things, and be thankful that one had an Aunt Rachel to take one's part—and a sick friend to go and see—and a New Year to look forward to—and that the Polish hens had begun to lay again.

The thought of what was to be done on Wednesday gave rise, I promise you, to no meagre amount of speculation and anxiety, thermometrical, barometrical, and purely fanciful—not only on the part of youth, but even maturity, Miss Fowke being, she flattered herself, not quite a wooden block yet. Besides, if any one had a right to express enjoyment from the circumstances of the proposed expedition, it was of a surety her, since on her shoulders would fall, so she averred, all the worry and trouble therefrom inseparable. It was very well for folks to twiddle their thumbs, and talk about getting into tempers, and making mountains of molehills—let them stir

about a bit, and be driven frantic with the contrariness of things, and then perhaps they'd pipe to a different measure.

"You'd better wash some of them lines out of your face before you honour the minister with your company," coolly observed Mr. Fowke, on Tuesday morning, when all the grievances had been called over, and the catastrophes reckoned up, and the future well blackened, "or you'll give the poor man such a turn that he won't be able to eat his Christmas dinner."

"My face is as God made it," was the dignified answer, "and as God made it it will stay. It's not to be supposed, after such a life as I've had, that I can look my age—neither do I care to. But what's this about a Christmas dinner? Do you mean the minister to dine here?" in the tone of one who suffered from a sense of aggravation.

"Certainly," replied Jacob. "Don't he always?"

Aunt Rachel stood silent.

"Then," said she, at length, "there'll have to be a bigger pudding, and I must put it on at four instead of five," and whisked off scul-

lerywards as petulantly as though to incur loss of sleep on Mr. Latchet's account were the worst and least familiar evil which could befall her.

Jacob smiled.

"Your aunt's mighty chary of giving herself trouble," said he to Tryphena.

"She is tired, I think," gravely answered that young woman. "She was up late last night, and anything fresh always seems to put her out so."

A downward curve of the lips betrayed that use had not blunted Mr. Fowke's perceptive faculties.

"Humph!" grunted he, "she don't have change enough. We must give her a treat, I think. There's nothing like novelty, they say, to liven people up."

"She *is* going to have a new dress," rejoined Tryphena, her face expressive of some slight surprise—"a blue twill with a black flower, if we can get one."

And Jacob burst out laughing, which was very rude of him and quite uncalled for, seeing the solemnity of the matter in hand.

"Why do you laugh?" inquired Phenie,

flushing, and looking a little vexed. "I am sure those twills are fit to be worn by anybody at any age. Mrs. Tucker had one last winter, and you can't think how nice it looked!"

But Mr. Fowke only laughed again. He was such a light-hearted creature, you know.

On Tuesday afternoon the question of the portmanteau—its packing, addressing, and final transmission, projectile-wise, through sundry atmospheric strata of mishaps, blunders, incompetencies, to that unknown world whither had already voyaged its owner—again stimulated anxiety and ruled intelligence.

"I know!" exclaimed Tryphena, after prolonged pondering—eyes lost in the interior of the said object, her arms full of a gray greatcoat; "let's take it in with us to-morrow, there'll be plenty of room for it under the seat, and then we can drop it at the coach office, and nobody be a bit the wiser. You say you don't want father to know?"

"No," said Aunt Rachel, getting off her knees, and holding out her hands for the coat, which she then proceeded to shake and slap as if it were a young child and turbulent,

"he does go on so, and the more one says to him the more one may. But that's not at all a bad idea of yours. He'll be off long before we start, so we shall have the house to ourselves, and it's not heavy. I can easily drag it downstairs, and John 'll lift it into the gig, There, I think I've got everything now."

But Tryphena, who had wandered to the mantel-piece, smiled, and held up a small and black something she had just taken from the mantel-shelf.

"What's that?" inquired Miss Fowke.

But the girl only held it higher.

"Dear!" came the vexed exclamation—"why, it's that bullet! If it hadn't gone clean out of my mind altogether, and I was dreaming of it last night, too. Here, give it to me, child. "He'll be glad to have it, I dare say, just as a curiosity. And to think that that little morsel of lead is worth a man's life!"

Tryphena smiled.

"I should never have vexed father if that had gone straight," observed she, meditatively; and then, as if shocked, as well she might be, I think, at her own tepidity, not

to say cold-bloodedness, exclaimed, shuddering, and gripping tight hold of her two arms: "But how dreadful of me! How can I be so horrid! Do you not hope it will be fine to-morrow?" abruptly, turning towards the window. "Fancy, if it rains!"

"It may rain cats and dogs for me," replied Miss Fowke, composedly, wrapping the bullet in paper.

"But then we should not be able to go."

"Why not? I'm not made of sugar or salt that I'm aware, or you either."

"But there are our bonnets!"

"Rain don't hurt print."

"Print!" echoed the girl, quite aghast.

"Yes, print!" reiterated Miss Fowke. "If it's a wet day I shall go in my hood and cloak, just the same as I should into the village—for go I will. The thing's got to be done, and it shall be done; to that I've made up my mind."

Whereat Tryphena turned again to the window, and gazing out into the reddened west, mutely but strenuously did long for a sunshiny morrow; for to appear in Coatham on market day in a print hood, just like any labourer's daughter, and not on an ordinary

market day even, but on the market day before Christmas—when all the ladies from round about drove in in their carriages, living parcels of splendour, and sometimes would alight and take a turn in the High Street, just to see the show at Mr. Fletcher's, the butcher's, and the taffetas and chenies and satinets and flowers and sashes displayed by Mr. Perkins, the head draper and silk mercer, and all the gay sights and doings incidental to that joyous occasion—I do assure you the bare notion of thus outraging decency was as terrific to this poor little rustic as was ever loss of diamonds to countess, informal marshalling of guests to Honourable Miss. That man was a sharp fellow who first found out that "a beam is no stronger than its weakest part."

CHAPTER II.

REAL AND MYSTICAL.

IN the outskirts of Coatham, journeying to the west, meandered a certain lane, pleasant enough in summer, being girt right and left with tall hedges, now odorous with may—now brave with dog-rose trails, pink and gold, and manifold bland elder blossom; but in winter so muddy and dull and unpleasant that the boys called it "Hangman's Ditch," and ladies gave it a wide berth, clogged or pattened. And in this lane was situate a red-brick house, whereon divers attenuated creepers and one sickly little monthly rose contrived, by great exercise of self-command, to obtain a scanty and precarious living—not a pretty or commanding or even picturesque house, seen from any point

or at any season; and in this house, best described by negatives, dwelt a Wesleyan minister and his housekeeper—a Wesleyan minister named Acts Latchet. Mr. Latchet was not in the least out of heart about his house—it suited him. If the boys did call the lane Hangman's Ditch, what did that matter? Boys were given to make fools of themselves all the world over. If the lane itself was, after rain, somewhat miry—nay, a very river of mire—why grumble?

To one of an active way of life when abroad and inclined to study when at home, any barrier between the workshop and the outer world—that outer world whereof the chief business is, it would seem, to waste the time, dissipate the energies, and interfere with the pursuits of its hapless hirelings—should be looked upon in the light rather of an inexhaustible blessing than an occasion for discontent. And so Acts did regard that much objurgated channel of great waters, on the shores of which necessity—no other suitable tenement than Brick House was vacant at the time of his arrival at Coatham—had compelled him to take up his dwelling. Yes, Brick

House, considered spherically—as spherically, that is, as you can consider anything completely square—was far from destitute of merit. Besides, if the exterior of this simply-named edifice was a little depressing, the interior, thanks to Mrs. Forbes, who was in her way—rather a sad and leisurely way—as zealous a devotee to scrubbing-brush and carpet-broom as Miss Fowke herself, the generosity of Mr. Latchet's maternal parent, who at the outset of his ministerial career had provided him with all things needful for the correct embellishment of a home—a wife excepted—and that gentleman's innate sense of propriety and even elegance, speedily dispelled any sense of chilliness ; not Mr. Perkins himself in his brand new mansion out at Kittock enjoying greater domestic comfort than did our pastor when snugly ensconced of a night in his own particular arm-chair, his keen eyes bent on the fair and familiar page of some favourite book taken from well-filled shelves, over the contents of which ruddy firelight played fitfully, touching gilt letters to a brighter gold, burnishing worn calf to bronze, between his lips a pipe, his grog neatly set

forth at his elbow—quiet, warmth, intellectual freedom, for a space, his most enviable possessions.

For Acts was a confirmed bibliophilist.

But while other members of the tribe whooped themselves hoarse over choice editions, black-letter copies, mediæval and monkish jest books, whereof the Latinity is only a little less insufferable than the humour, this limited and grovelling person positively preferred excellence of matter to eccentricity or even richness of binding—beauty of diction to the most elaborate border ever executed. The value of a book, according to him, depended on what you could get out of it—you, as a feeling, doing, reasoning creature—not how it looked. Likewise resolutely refused he adhesion to that fallacy, so dear to many, which brackets age with merit; also, being a fair linguist, foreign authors as well as British afforded him the pleasantest of winter evenings—the most delightful of summer noons. Yes! A literary student was Mr. Latchet, though no bookworm—a lover of literature core-through.

It is possible that had this man in early youth escaped the fascinations of religious

controversy, and thrown those energies which he in after years devoted to the establishment and furtherance of his cause into some more active and remunerative pursuit, he might have attained a certain dignity and stability of position even among those whom the populace loves to call great; as it was, culture only added force to those eleemosynary appeals, those analytical disquisitions, those rhetorical outbursts, imaginative, argumentative, descriptive, whereby he contrived week by week to cajole, interest, and occasionally astonish the traders, traders' wives and daughters, John Tapps and Marthas, on whose liberality he depended to a great degree for means of livelihood. It was not a very grand life; indeed there were times when, looking through the bars as it were, and noting the nobility of gait, the fine carelessness of gesture which characterized free humanity, Acts would frown gloomily, and wonder whether it might not be better to burst bonds, make a quite fresh beginning.

"I should have a wider field for exertion in a manufacturing town," he had thought before now; "here I am lost, stifled. A Rousseau, a

a Whitfield, a Pascal, might be living among these people, and they would be none the wiser, but——" and where reflection ceased certainty began. He could not put miles upon miles between himself and Shobdon. Coatham he would leave to-morrow, shaking the dust off his feet, and thanking God for the deliverance, but Shobdon——No, it was of no use. He could not do it.

By-and-bye, perhaps, when he saw his way a little clearer—when things had consolidated somewhat, so that a man could tell how to deal with them—he might look about for another opening. And then it would be too late, circumstance would have shifted, the outlet once navigable would be sand-choked; so does Love ever fool him who, being set in a straight path, pauses to hearken to his thrumming. No seen enemy so terrible as this sly rhyme-jingler. I do not know exactly why I tell you all this. It is, I think, because in my coarse, clumsy way I am anxious to make the man known to you, known even as I know him, known in his badness, known in his goodness; for Acts, despite his lack of scruple, his resolute determination to march on over

right, over wrong, undeterred by principle, unchecked by Pity, straight up to the object of desire—to storm, escalade, and finally carry that object with as little compunction or reference to personal sentiment as is displayed by the general of a victorious army when making arrangements for billeting their troops on the friends and relatives of the vanquished, despite all this, I say, Acts Latchet was not as yet entirely cast away. He did try to effect good, and he effected it; for his mental immorality, though a far deadlier psychic poison than bodily transgression, caused him no loss of influence with others—even as a man may intoxicate himself with sedatives and escape blame, who, if he attained a similar state of obfuscation by the use of alcohol, would be called a drunkard, and excluded from all decorous circles. He also was guilty of many unobtrusive acts of kindness, and in encouraging the charitable inclinations of others did not forget to cultivate his own. No, Acts, bad as he was, bad as he might become, could never be a monster.

He was too intelligent.

Concerning the projected visit of "my

friends, Miss Fowke and her niece," as he had styled Aunt Rachel and Tryphena when mentioning their probable appearance on the afternoon of Wednesday to Mrs. Forbes, who forthwith pulled a long face, and very properly "'oped they weren't pertickler," there can be no doubt that this man of many minds thought much.

"I should have liked, if I could," pondered he, as he lingered over his breakfast on the morning of the memorable day—a quite beautiful morning, be it observed—"to have had some flowers about the place; she is so fond of flowers. I wonder if Mrs. Perkins has any in her greenhouse, and if she has if she would give me a few; they make a room so liveable, and I do want her to be pleased—to see everything at its best—my child, my little white dove, whom I would catch in my big hands, and place in my bosom, and speak pleasantly unto. Ah! little dove, you flutter and uplift your ringed eyes skyward, and coo piteously to follow that sharp-beaked, glossy-plumaged falcon, who, now lost to view, lately skimmed and swooped and made perilous flights over and under and round about your nest; but

little dove, that falcon, were you to follow him, would turn on you—strike his keen talons to your heart—pluck out your pretty eyes. Nay, thou art better here, my sweet, my little one."

A rhapsody, say you? But Acts thought in rhapsodies. I have told you long ago that he was a born orator—words, keen, meaningful, musical words, rose in his mind, ceaselessly as the balls from the hand of a skilful juggler. He amazed crowds by the fluency of his speech. "It is the voice of a god!" cried the unlearned. My friend, it was the voice of the man's soul. When that is silent, how shall one speak? But I was telling you how he wished to make his little ugly, square, red-brick house fair in the sight of his Beloved; how he thought it possible that Mrs. Perkins might, in the plenitude of her kindliness—she was a nice little woman was Mrs. Perkins, a six months' bride and comely—spare him a few blossoms from her fine new conservatory, which latter piece of vitreous extravagance caused great scandal among the brethren, specially the sisters, and occasioned the enunciation of divers ugly prophecies con-

cerning her lord's future, which prophecies have, however, no place in this history. So he—Acts—did that morning call upon Mrs. Perkins, and did humble himself before her—yea, even to the new Brussels carpet—for the sake of his Beloved; and did come away from Kittock Folly—so Perkins had christened his Italian villa—the richer by a fine rose growing in a pot, a bunch of quite gorgeous camellias—one white, two variegated, and three crimson—and surely the warmest hand-squeeze and pleasantest "you know I am always glad to oblige you," ever given or said since the world was.

Good little Mrs. Perkins.

And now the shadows having lengthened and the sun's power decreased—but a meagre modicum of power at best—Acts put down his volume of St. Basil (he was reading the Homilies on the Hexæmeron), rose from his chair, and walked to the window. To his rear leapt and glowed and chattered a great fire—in itself best of welcomes; on the maroon-draped table stood a quaint little china basket, brimful of colour, white, and red, and green; over his head trilled, and chirped, and dispensed

with quite lavish liberality water and seed in equal quantities, the canary whereof he made mention to Tryphena on Sunday; to the ceiling climbed books, books, books. It looked very cheery, very homelike, very sociable. It would be a wonder if she, even she, did not discover that, he thought.

Meanwhile time sped. Mrs. Forbes, soberly imposing in her Sunday gown, a black poplin decorated with gimp, which always reminded Acts—why he knew not—of dining-room chairs, and a fair cap rich in white satin ribbon, rustled in to ask if she should not lay the tea "afore the ladies come," also if she hadn't better have one of the best table-cloths. A drove of little black pigs passed, loudly grunting up the lane, driven by an old man and a boy; a clock struck four, still no bonnets could be seen.

"Surely they will come!" mused the minister, knitting his brows, and stretching his neck to obtain a more extended view; and as he gazed, it suddenly occurred to him how very terribly disappointed he would be if they by any chance should have been prevented from adhering to their original intention.

Hark, though! what is that—girlish laughter—a girl's voice upraised in tones of remonstrance?

His dark face bright with pleasure, Mr. Latchet hurried from the room, through the little hall, out to the garden gate.

Yes, there they were—Aunt Rachel, skirts raised, eyes bent on the ground, face grave to grimness, tiptoeing along as daintily as e'er a court dame of them all; Tryphena, her cheeks aglow, her lips parted in an amused smile, in one hand a bandbox, over her arm her tartan cloak.

"See, aunt," exclaimed she, on catching sight of our Amphitryon, and nodded herself vigorously. She was in good spirits this afternoon, was Miss Phenie, partly by reason of having gotten her a bonnet to her liking, likewise of having overheard herself called a "sweet, pretty creature" by a little old lady in a sable cloak, to whom she had restored a dropped parcel on the market steps; likewise of having chanced to encounter Martha within the precincts of that venerable institution, and seen that personage look grave and shake her head, when informed of the manner in which

they proposed to bring the day to a conclusion. Never a female saint in the calendar but could be perverse when occasion offered, I'll warrant her.

"Where?" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, giving her petticoats a rearward hoist the reverse of graceful; "oh!" looking up, "how do you do, sir? So we've got here at last, but what a place to be sure. Why ever don't you make 'em have it scraped?"

"Scraped," echoed Acts, laughing, and taking her by the hand; "why this is a mere trifle—indeed, I was congratulating myself on the improved state of things. You should see it after a thunder shower. Do you know, though," turning to Tryphena, "I began to fear that you were not coming?"

"Indeed!" said she, suffering him to relieve her of the cloak—"are we so late, then? I told aunt we ought to make haste, but she would insist on picking her way."

"I should think so, indeed!" retorted that lady; "I don't see the kindness of carrying an acre of mud along with you into a friend's parlour—spoiling the carpet. But"—entering the hall—"'twasn't that that kept us.

We met Dr. Sprague by the church, and he got talking about Mr. Valoynes, and one thing and another. You know what a one he is to gossip."

Acts smiled.

"Yes," he said; "I know the worthy doctor likes a chat, and of course he was anxious for tidings of his late patient. Ah, there is Forbes—you will like to take off your bonnets. Show Miss Fowke into the spare bedroom, Forbes, and get some hot water. You must please excuse deficiencies."

"Dear me!" smiled Aunt Rachel—"I'm sure you need not apologize, I was just thinking how nice it all was. Bring the band-box, Phenie—I shall want my cap."

So, preceded by Mrs. Forbes, they forthwith climbed the stairs, feeling already quite at home, and free to take their ease.

"It is because there is no Mrs. Latchet, I think," concluded Tryphena, as they entered the aforesaid chamber, and sat her down upon a neighbouring chair, having suddenly turned weary.

"Come," said Aunt Rachel, hastily unpinning her shawl, and throwing it on the bed

—a four-poster, with blue and white hangings—"you can sit downstairs, and in the gig, we mustn't keep Mrs. Forbes. I know what things are, Mrs. Forbes, so don't you stay to wait on us."

"The young lady looks tired," observed Mrs. Forbes, in a sad, low voice—her habitual voice be it said—"perhaps she is not very strong."

"Oh, yes, I am," smiled Tryphena, untying her bonnet strings, "only we have been about a good deal this afternoon."

"Ah," said Mrs. Forbes, "in the family where I lived before I came to Mr. Latchet, we had a great deal of sickness, a very great deal. I've been up night after night for weeks at a time. Missus, she suffered from gallstones in the liver. I dare say you'll 'ave 'eard of that before, mum?"

"Yes," said Aunt Rachel, opening the bandbox, "I have, and a very painful disorder I believe it is too."

"Oh, shockin'!" rejoined Mrs. Forbes, with emphasis. "Well, sometimes just as I was gettin' off to sleep I would be waked up by some one ringin' at my bell—there was a bell put in my room on purpose—and I would 'ave

to go and get mustard and 'ot water and—but that reminds me, you'd like some to wash your 'ands with?"

"No, thank you," replied Aunt Rachel, turning to the glass. "We shall do very well. Tryphena, just tell me if my collar's straight behind?"

"Yes," said Tryphena, adjusting a sandal—"quite!" and Mrs. Forbes departed kitchenwards.

"He has it all very nice," observed Miss Fowke thoughtfully, when they were alone—manipulating a tail-comb with care and skill. She always wore ringlets when going into society—ringlets and a band of black velvet, whence drooped a small pearl ornament, bound tightly about her brow. To-day, however, this decorative detail was omitted, because business mingled with pleasure, and gewgaws did not look well in the street.

"Mrs. Forbes told us about the mustard and hot water the last time we were here," remarked Tryphena, getting up, and shaking out her dress—a puce silk, that silk she was desired to assume in honour of the reappearance of a certain person who shall be name-

less; "that was three years ago. I wonder if she would tell us it all over again if we were to make a third appearance three years hence?"

"There must be, I should think," pursued Aunt Rachel, "three other bedrooms on this floor besides the attics. It is not at all a bad house for a small family."

"A family of two," smiled Phenie, oddly.

"Or three. He has a good bit of furniture. I wonder what he pays Mrs. Forbes."

"Ask him," was the ironical answer; "or I will. How nice it would sound: 'Mr. Latchet, may I inquire how much you spend on your servant? Do you allow her meat for her dinner, and if so, how much and of what sort; also, I should be glad to know if she has a candle to go to bed by; and, do you wash at home?'"—bursting into the merriest laughter—laughter which Acts hearing in his sitting-room, mentally termed ravishing.

But Aunt Rachel was in no mirthful mood. She had on her brown satin and a pair of new shoes. Besides, when circumstances most deftly tempted to a jest, her sense of humour seldom waxed importunate.

"Be quiet," exclaimed she, irefully. "How often have I told you that to make a noise in other people's houses is the most vulgar thing any one can do? And just look at that bow. No, not that one—the other. Come here, and let me put it to rights for you. So!" dealing delicately with a dark and glossy convolution perched atop of a dainty little head; "really your manners are quite horrible!"

"It's my bonnet," said Tryphena, deprecatorily; "there is a bit of wire that always catches in my hair when I take it off. I must see to it."

"I wasn't speaking of your hair!" was the frigid reply; "your hair does well enough. Have you a handkerchief?"

"Yes," answered the girl, battling hard for gravity.

"Then we may as well go down; but," pausing half way to the door, "mind you don't spill your tea, or take things before you're asked, or speak with your mouth full."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Phenie, petulantly, "I shall not speak at all if you say any more."

"And what if you don't?" retorted Miss

Fowke. "Do you think we shall go into mourning?"

After which passage of arms they, in silence and with some dignity of carriage, sought the stairs.

It was quite clear to Aunt Rachel that young women nowadays required a great deal of keeping in order.

CHAPTER III.

I WHISPER WITH MY LIPS CLOSE TO YOUR EAR!

IN the hall they were met by Mr. Latchet.

"Ah," smiled he—"so there you are! I thought I heard the 'glad music of light feet.' And now for the toasting of the toes and warming of the poor little frozen fingers. I am afraid I am a very poor host, for I believe that as yet I have omitted to bid you welcome; but that you are welcome I hope you know, without being told. Try the arm-chair, Miss Fowke. Yes, you must—just to please me. I have so often seen you sitting in it with my mind's eye. And you, Miss Phenie, come and sit by me on the sofa. See, I will pull it up to the fire—there! Ah!"—sinking down

thereon and sighing happily—"why don't we do this oftener?"

"Do you mean, why don't we come to see you oftener?" inquired Tryphena, a little stiffly.

"Well, yes."

"It wouldn't be convenient, for one thing, and for another you would get tired of it. One can see enough of people, I find."

"Of some people."

Aunt Rachel coughed.

"We are exceedingly obliged to you for all your kindness, I am sure," observed she, gravely, "and very glad to rest a bit. Besides, it is pleasant to see that you are so comfortable. When we took tea with you before, if you remember, you were scarcely settled, and the house struck cold; but now ——" looking about her admiringly.

"Yes," said Acts, nursing his knee; "I have no cause for discontent. Indeed, since my mother's death, I have been quite well off in respect of——"

"Get out, cat!" here exclaimed Mrs. Forbes, pushing open the door with her elbow, and appearing, covered dish in hand. "We daren't

let 'im in, mum"—addressing Aunt Rachel—"because of the bird. S-s-s-s!—be off with ye!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Tryphena, jumping up from the sofa as if already tired of inaction—"the bird! I had quite forgotten all about the bird. Tweet, tweet," face upturned to the cage hanging in the window, "pretty Dicky. Poor Dicky. What a knowing-looking little creature! See, aunt, he opens his beak when you speak to him. But how dreadful to live always in prison!"

"You would not like such a life?" smiled Acts, rising also and following her.

"I? no! I should soon die, I think. Indeed it would vex me to keep a creature in that way. I remember Tom Tapp gave me a squirrel when I was a little girl, and father got me a cage, but do you know I was forced to let Frisk out one day. I could not bear to see him watching me, poor thing!"

"Yes," said Aunt Rachel, "and much good you did by letting Frisk out. Didn't the cats get him that very night?"

"Yes, I know," replied Tryphena; "but I couldn't tell that."

"Tea is ready, sir," observed Mrs. Forbes.

"Oh!" said Mr. Latchet, who had been listening to the foregoing dialogue, eyes upraised, his hands clasped behind him, a smile upon his lips—this talented gentleman had his own ideas concerning captivity, in common with most other subjects—"Then," turning to the table and setting a chair before the teapot, silvern, and nearly as handsome as that held in honour at the Grange—not quite though, having for lid-ornament merely a diminutive pine-apple, instead of two acorns and an oak-leaf—"will you be so kind as to preside, Miss Fowke?"

Aunt Rachel changed colour.

"If you like," she smiled, "but really!"

"But really," echoed he, coaxingly, "your tea-making powers are too renowned to admit of hesitation. Will you sit here, Tryphena, or with your back to the fire?"

He had not called her Tryphena for years—never since her sixteenth birthday, when he brought her a little book, entitled "The Corner, the Nail, and the Battle Bow," and said, "Tryphena, I hope this may be of use to you," and pressed her hand, and—and, well

—kissed her on the forehead, paternally. The girl thrilled at the sound of her own name—and blushed, and said that she did not care where she sat, which was, indeed, quite true—seeing that she could sit nowhere happily.

"In that case," said he, "you shall sit here," placing a chair at his right hand, "and cut the bread. I think you may be trusted to do that."

So down they sat, and Aunt Rachel poured out the tea, and Tryphena distributed the upper portion of the home-made loaf in neat little wedges, the carving of which, despite Mr. Latchet's confidence in her abilities, cost her no small pains, and Mr. Latchet himself helped the "crescent"—a big veal and ham rissole, in shape similar to a new moon, the which, be sure, Mrs. Forbes regarded as a work of art of no mean order—and to enjoy one's self seemed not only natural, but imperative.

"My brother," said Aunt Rachel, when she had tasted the aforesaid condiment—and was privately convinced that it required pepper—"hopes, sir, that you will dine with us on Christmas Day—next Sunday, that is."

"Oh, thank you," exclaimed Acts, "I shall be delighted. Indeed, I quite reckoned on getting an invitation, to tell you the truth."

"And why not," was the pleased rejoinder, "when you've had one every year? I don't know why he put off asking you till so late; but that he had it in his head is certain. I know that from the way he brought it out. What a good cook you've got."

"Yes," replied the minister, composedly, "she does her best."

"May I trouble you for the salt, Phenie?" said Aunt Rachel.

"Of course," pursued Mr. Latchet, abandoning his fork—he was not hungry—"what one misses in this sort of home is society—not that I lack friends, but friends cannot be with one always, and——"

"To be sure," sympathized Miss Fowke.

"However," continued he, after a while, more cheerfully, "Rome was not built in a day—one must wait."

"Waiting can do no harm," smiled Aunt Rachel, "so long as you don't wait too long. For myself I prefer action. Strike while the iron's hot is my rule, and it's a good one."

"Yes," smiled the minister; "but what if the iron won't heat?"

"Then I don't know," said she; "I should say in that case 'twas best to let it alone altogether, or make up a bigger fire."

Acts laughed.

"We shall see," said he, and asked Tryphena if she would take some more "crescent" or have a jam puff; whereto she made answer that she would have a jam puff, being hungry and hardened. What did it signify what he said? she knew what he meant well enough, speaking or silent.

And then they fell a-talking about divers matters—the state of the market and the streets, prices, whom they had met during their runnings to and fro; how they had found Martha in company with blind Blegg, Harry Blegg, the wood turner, at the top of Pipe Street—she was "settin' 'im 'ome," she said, which deed of charity would take the silly thing quite half a mile out of her way, Aunt Rachel reckoned, she being bound for Friar Lane,—Tryphena, I regret to say, laughed wickedly at the mention of this encounter, remembering certain visual signs and

tokens and one spoken "Theer now;" and how Mr. Perkins had wanted them to become the owners respectively of an India muslin, white, and worked all up the front, and a lavender *gros de Naples*—"a beautiful thing, certainly, but quite beyond the means of anybody not a duchess;" and how Mrs. Baker had tried on bonnet after bonnet, and nothing would do but a green velvet with a soft crown and a white feather across the brim, which came to thirty-eight shillings—a long price, to be sure, but Mr. Fowke had been so positive about its lasting. Acts begged—nay, implored—that this precious inspiration might be brought down and subjected to his criticism, tried on before him, and exhibited in all lights. "Wait till next Sunday," laughed Aunt Rachel, "then you shall see it, and properly. 'Twouldn't do to put green next to those cheeks. She'd look for all the world like a peony just bursting into flower;" and how Dr. Sprague, directly he caught sight of them, must needs come hobbling along the street, and talk—Lord, how the man did talk! —about the weather, about folks' chests, about Mr. Valoynes, whose portmanteau they, by

the way, had dropped at the coach-office as they drove by—Acts smiled as he heard that; "another link broken," thought he—how this, how that, how the other. Dear! I have no mind to tell you one half they found to talk of, Acts and Tryphena and Aunt Rachel, but it is certain that they talked a very great deal, and seemed exceeding gleeful up to the very moment when the sound of wheels and trotting hoofs in the lane intimated that thirty minutes had elapsed since the clock struck six, and that the moment of separation was at hand.

"I told Davis," said Miss Fowke, becoming aware that a vehicle approached, "to send the gig up here, because I thought it might be dirty under foot, and 'tis so desperate uncomfortable sploshing about after dark. We must go and get on our bonnets."

"But why did you tell him to send so early?" rejoined Acts, reproachfully — Mr. Davis was the landlord of the "Kite and Pigeons," at which well-known and long-established hostel it was the habit of all Fowkes to seek refreshment whether for selves or beasts—"there is a moon; you need not have started for another hour at least."

"Well," smiled Aunt Rachel, "to speak the truth I'm not quite so brave about being out late as I used to be. Since Mr. Valoynes was stopped, I've seemed to see a face in every weed, as the saying is. I dare say it's foolish, and I try to get the better of it, but you see 'twouldn't do for me to be palsied with terror and let the reins go, or drive into the ditch just because a donkey chanced to bray, or a gipsy lad to put his head over a hedge."

"Well, no," said Acts—"no; there's something in that, I allow."

"So," continued she, "I thought I'd better take the road at a time when there'd be plenty of honest folks about, for I find that there's nothing like a good stout reason as a cure for silly fears."

Mr. Latchet laughed.

"At that rate," said he, "your peace of mind must be assured."

Then Mrs. Forbes came with a candle, and they went away upstairs.

"What are you talking about?" inquired Phenie, groping her way into the dimly lit and slightly airless apartment, whither her elders had preceded her by some two minutes.

"Nothing that concerns you," snapped Aunt Rachel. "You get on your clothes, and take care that you don't leave anything behind. The last time I brought you out, you lost your gloves and a veil, recollect."

"I was saying," observed Mrs. Forbes, proffering the down-trodden one the little gold shawl-pin wherewith she secured her victorine, "that master might soon find a wife if his thoughts ran that way. The ladies do make such a to-do with him!"

"Really!" said Tryphena, "I wonder at that, seeing that he is neither rich nor handsome!"

"That's what do puzzle me!" said Mrs. Forbes, with animation; "but 'tis 'is way, I suppose; 'e certainly can talk very nice when 'e 'as a mind to."

"Yes," said Phenie, "but the nicest talking in the world won't keep house."

At which very commonplace and even coarse observation both women laughed heartily.

"She's a sharp one," applauded Mrs. Forbes; "she's your niece, 'm?" addressing Aunt Rachel.

"Well," smiled that lady, "I won't quite disown her; but does the minister go about much, then, that you say he's so sought after?"

"No, 'm, 'ardly at all. 'E'll be at work all day visitin' the sick, and teachin' in the school, and seein' to one thing and another, and then of a night 'e'll set down to 'is writin' or 'is book; 'e do read an astonishin' deal. No, 'tis very seldom indeed that 'e goes anywhere 'cept to you and Mrs. Chipper's."

"Ah," said Aunt Rachel, "Mrs. Chipper! I think I've heard him mention her. And his room is next to this. The same size, I suppose?"

"Yes, 'm, just. But do you look in and see for yourself."

"Oh," smiled Aunt Rachel, "but what if he were to come up and find me there?"

"Lor," exclaimed Mrs. Forbes, holding open the door, "what would that matter? Why, 'e'd be quite pleased to think you made so free. Come, now!"

Aunt Rachel wavered.

"And miss," pursued our temptress; "she'd like a peep as well."

But miss shook her head.

"No, thank you," responded she; "I must look after my belongings."

So they left her, the noodle, the unambitious, benighted noodle—left her forthwith, in company with a flickering rushlight and some cause for merriment. If one did but see what goes on behind one.

For a while a subdued and legato murmuring—occasionally strengthened by staccato notes of admiration, doubtless—alone broke the silence. Then a door creaked, petticoats rustled, and Aunt Rachel exclaimed:

"And a serpent on the mantelpiece!"

"'Tisn't a serpent 'm," remonstrated Mrs. Forbes; "'tis what they call a pipe-fish—didn't you see its beak?"

"Beak," said Miss Fowke, disgustedly; "the idea of sleeping with such a thing as that in your room! But that's why I always say that 'tis well for a man to marry. A wife keeps her eyes open, and turns out the rubbish!——"

"I shouldn't care to 'ave the turnin' out of that there jar," observed Mrs. Forbes, "wife or no wife. Why, master do set as much store by it as some would on a 'undred

pounds! 'Don't you never touch that, Forbes,' said 'e to me the very first day I come, 'for I caught it my own self when I was fishin' at Whitby, and I wouldn't lose it for untold gold.'"

Aunt Rachel's lips lessened.

"Humph!" ejaculated she; "well, every man to his liking, as the old woman said when she kissed her cow. For my part I think it's sickening. Have you done up the bandbox?"

"Yes," responded Tryphena, just a little puzzled by this sudden outburst of personal feeling, but far too deeply convinced of her own insignificance to ask for an explanation, and all other preparations for departure being completed, they betook themselves downstairs.

"Come in and have a warm before you start," said Mr. Latchet, hurrying out of the dining-room, on hearing footsteps; "I have made up the fire on purpose."

But Aunt Rachel shook her head. The mare was not very good to stand, and they had been over long already.

"You see," smiled she, as Mrs. Forbes opened the hall door, and called out, "The ladies are ready"—"if the master were to get

home before us, and find himself shut out—I've got the key of the back door in my pocket—there'd be old Harry to pay, and nothing to pay him with; and when one has enjoyed oneself——"

"I thought," interposed Acts, glancing at Tryphena, whose eyes were fixed upon the gig, "that Mr. Fowke might have looked in on his way home; but, I suppose the claims of business were too pressing."

"He was going to have a pipe with Hickman, I think—Hickman, of Chadlington. Thank you, Mrs. Forbes, I should have forgotten it, and that's the third umbrella I've had in seven years. Now, Phenie, say good-night, and let's be going."

Thus exhorted, Tryphena put away her thoughts—she had been wondering whether Robert had yet reached Kirton—and turning herself about, said, holding out her hand:

"Good-night, Mr. Latchet; and—and—thank you for a very pleasant evening."

This, being a well-disposed and carefully-brought-up young person, also a little bit of a lady.

"May we spend many more such pleasant

evenings!" smiled he, cordially pressing her small fingers; "would that it were my happy lot never to spend an evening otherwise! But now that you have made the attempt without sustaining any very serious injury, I trust that no great length of time may elapse before you pay me another visit."

"I won't say anything about that," said Aunt Rachel, who never, under the fieriest of temptations, permitted fancy to obscure, disguise, or even trifle with fact; "that lane's enough to keep off anybody short of a man-of-war; besides, we so seldom leave home—still, when we do have occasion to come into town—"

"You'll come here," exclaimed Acts. "That's enough, for"—palm meeting palm—"I know that you are a lady of your word."

Miss Fowke smiled.

"Yes," allowed she, "I generally do as I intend, if it is to be done, that is. Take care how you get up, child. Have you got the box?"

"Yes," cried Tryphena from the gig, into which she had already mounted, having a strong objection to protracted leave-takings—

leave-takings which necessitated goodness alone knew how many hand-shakes, mendacious utterances, unprovoked assaults upon conscience generally; whereupon Miss Fowke, accompanied by the minister, Mrs. Forbes bringing up the rear, forthwith proceeded to the gate.

"I think," said Acts, blandly, as he assisted Aunt Rachel to her seat of power—a somewhat delicate business, and trying to a man's nerves—"that you will have a prosperous journey so far as weather is concerned, the stars are so very bright, and the outline of the moon so sharp. What do you say, Henry?" turning to the lame ostler at the "Kite," to whose charge Boniface Davis had confided the Fowke equipage.

"Beautiful night, sir," was the queerly-toned answer. Henry had, so ran tradition, no "roof" to his mouth, which was a great pity, people thought, as otherwise he was a worthy soul, and deserving of a better fate than to be the butt and, as it were, legalized excuse for tyranny on the part of all the ruffianly boys and idle fellows in the town. So thought Tryphena.

"Yes," said Aunt Rachel taking the reins, and assuming that rigidity of attitude and feature which she, in common with other not quite unmeritorious or obscure personages (turn to the caricatures of the period), held essential to the proper control of equine behaviour—"I dare say it will be pleasant when we get clear of the town. Lead her round, Henry; there's a big stone close to the hedge; I noticed it as we came. Dear, what ruts! There, that's right. Now then, Polly. Good-night, Mrs. Forbes; good-night, sir."

"Good-night," said they both.

"My compliments to Mr. Fowke," added the minister; and away they went—jig, jog, jig, jog—Henry hobbling after, as well pleased a gig's load as could easily be met with.

For some time, however, no word was spoken, the road being rough and Polly stubborn, endowed, moreover, with a rooted objection to going straight, the result of partial loss of sight.

"One might as well drive a pig!" at length exclaimed Aunt Rachel, angrily; "wake up, can't you?"

"Perhaps she is tired," said Tryphena, "or

they may not have given her as much corn as she is accustomed to."

"Perhaps a fiddlestick!" was the tart response. "You wait till I get you on the high road, my lady!"

At which alarming observation Polly pricked up her ears, tossed her head, and quickened her pace wonderfully.

"The old hypocrite!" laughed Aunt Rachel, "I do believe she understands what you say; just you see how she goes when your father's behind her. Why, I remember one day he drove me over to see Mrs. Pouter, at Chadlington, and she got there in an hour and a quarter—nine miles in an hour and a quarter!"

"Ah!" smiled Tryphena, "that was because she was frightened, poor thing. I should not like her to run like that for me!"

"Pooh!" scoffed Miss Fowke, "perhaps you'd like to feed her on loaf-sugar, and stable her in the best bedroom."

But to this very wild suggestion response seemed quite unnecessary.

Tryphena tightened her wraps in silence—for the night was bitter, despite the glory of the firmament.

"I wonder," said she, after a while, eyes uplifted, "what the stars really are. Robert declares that they are worlds—just like our world, but hotter or colder, as they approach or recede from the sun."

"Gracious!" ejaculated Aunt Rachel. "Did any one ever hear such stuff! Worlds, indeed!"

"Oh, but," argued our sciolist, with fine sciolistic pertinacity, "it is quite true—all the astronomers say so. Besides——"

"What do I care about astronomers?" broke forth vulgar prejudice; "I tell you it's rubbish. Didn't God, in the beginning, make two great lights, 'the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night? He made the stars also.'"

"Yes, of course," said Tryphena, "but——oh"—pausing as her quick ears caught the sound of a horse's hoofs—"some one is coming. Pull to one side, aunt. Just think if it should be some terrible——"

"Ah!" observed Aunt Rachel, impressively.

"Why, it's father!" exclaimed the girl, breaking into a merry laugh—"how ridiculous! Do you know, father," as Mr. Fowke trotted

up, "I actually took you to be a highwayman!"

Jacob smiled.

"Did you?" said he, slackening his pace; "and what would you have done if I had proved to be one?"

"Screamed," was the prompt rejoinder.

"Pshaw!" scoffed he; "much use that'd have been. Why, I should just have twitched off that muffler, crammed it into your mouth, and——"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel—"what dreadful bloodthirsty nonsense! Pray say no more—'tis enough to give one the horrors. Come up, you animal," slashing Polly with a will; "there, you see, she takes no more notice than if I beat the hedge. Of all the obstinate old——"

"Let me come to her," said Jacob, pricking alongside; but he had no need; away went the old mare with a bound which nearly jerked Tryphena out on to the road.

Aunt Rachel laughed till she could scarce hold the reins.

"Well, and what did Latchet say to you?" inquired Mr. Fowke, when calm was

again restored, and the lights of the village twinkled in the distance.

"He was very kind," replied Aunt Rachel —"very. We had a meat cake at tea, and some jam puffs, and a custard pudding, and biscuits."

"And did he talk much to you, Phenie— pay you attention—run about after you?"

"Oh, I don't know," smiled Tryphena; "he was about the same as usual."

"A man would be hard set to run much in a room no bigger than our poultry-yard," observed Miss Fowke, dryly; "except he ran round and round, like a kitten after its own tail!"

Whereat Jacob laughed, and bade her be careful how she turned into the lane. They had all but reached home now.

The old house looked just a little dreary, Tryphena thought, as they drew up at the gate, and made ready to dismount—so gray and lifeless. True, Beauty did her best to dissipate the gloom, barking quite furiously behind the locked door. Still, it disappointed you, as will a face once dear when seen after years of separation—the picture you, as a child,

gazed up at wonder-struck, when looked upon by eyes made wise of seeing. There is no such test of faith as change.

"If you'll go and see after the supper," said Jacob, "I'll look to the trap. Wo-ho, Peter!"

"Very well," said Aunt Rachel, hurrying away up the garden walk—"we'll have some ham and eggs. I'm quite hungry, for all I made such a good tea. Bless the dog!—she's fit to tear one in pieces. Be quiet, Beauty!—down, madam!"

But Tryphena took madam aside and kissed her many times, and whispering that she had brought her a "fairing"—which was quite true, having positively expended the sum of one halfpenny on a carraway biscuit with that design—forthwith extracted the said confection from the uttermost depths of a labyrinthine pocket; a rash and ill-considered proceeding, the immediate consequence of which was such a display of agility, vocal resources, and gratitude, that Miss Fowke felt discipline to be at stake, and a threat to pack one out into the yard and the other off to bed, both supperless, unless they stopped that noise this instant, simply essential to the

maintenance of anything like decency. Order re-established and the fire lit, to lay the cloth and otherwise prepare for recuperative action became a matter of moments.

By half-past eight Mr. Fowke had almost exhausted not only capacity but desire.

"And now," said he, the table being cleared and his pipe filled, "you'd better go to bed. I'll lock up. 'Tis no use for you to sit gaping there like a pair o' alligators."

Whereupon they (Tryphena and Aunt Rachel) arose, and bidding him good-night—Tryphena specially felt worn out by the divers interests and incidents of this most fatiguing day—crawled wearily away upstairs.

"The idea!" said Aunt Rachel, to herself, as she put on her nightcap—"a pickled snake upon the mantelpiece!"

CHAPTER IV.

AND I WILL THREAD A THREAD.

THE preparations for Christmas went briskly forward. The turkey had been slain by John—Aunt Rachel would kill a fowl or duck or even a goose, with any one, she said, but one of those great gobbling monsters—no! the noblest ambition, the hottest zeal, will somewhere find a limit, —the turkey had been slain by John, I repeat, on Monday afternoon, and now swung in state by his two black legs from a peg in the larder, an object of interest, and even respect—for so fine a bird had never yet graced the Grange dinner-table—to all beholders. On Thursday Tryphena, armed with a big clasp-

knife and the stoutest of gloves, went with Mr. Tapp to get holly and yew and ivy from the down, as was her yearly custom. They had the cart, and rode there and back in great comfort, likewise their spoils were plenteous and splendid, the holly trees amply fulfilling the promise given when a certain young man and young woman took a walk that way one autumn afternoon not yet quite relegated to oblivion; but despite the plenitude of berries and the generally successful texture of the expedition, the expedition was scarcely successful.

For Martha would not join therein.

"Oh, do come," pleaded Tryphena, as excuse after excuse met her persuasions; "it will not be a bit nice without you, and we have always gone together—always—ever since I can remember."

"All the more reason why we shouldn't go together this time," retorted Martha; "you're so fond of change, you know," eyeing the girl ironically, as she stood, one foot, one hand, on the old garden gate, swinging it to and fro, after an indolent and absent fashion, which would assuredly have excited Aunt Rachel's liveliest indignation.

Miss Tomboy had been at the pains to walk down to her friend's cottage to ascertain her intentions.

"I do not know anything of the sort," returned she, aggrievedly; "I only know that the more I love people, the less do they seem to love me. See how fond I am of you, and yet you will not put yourself out ever so little to give me pleasure. What do I care to go straggling off there all alone?"

"You'll 'ave fayther," was the composed rejoinder; "I thought you liked bein' with 'im?"

"So I do," answered the girl quickly; "but he isn't you, and I don't want to get on that down by myself. 'Twill put me in mind of things, and wake up all my wretchedness. Oh, Martha, dear, do you come, please!"

"Miss Phenie," said Martha gravely, "I don't approve of the way you're goin' on, and I shan't have nowt to do with it. You can see two ways if you like; I prefer to keep my eyes str'ight in front of me."

"The way I am going on!" echoed Tryphena, wonderingly—"the way I am going on!"

"Yes," reiterated Martha, "the way you

are goin' on. I saw your look when I met you in the market yesterday. Do you think I've known you from your cradle, and can't read your face when I care to? Phoo!"

Tryphena shook her head.

"I don't know what you mean," sighed she; "I could not help smiling when you said 'There now!' because——"

"Ah!" interposed Martha, "I see it all plain enough. 'Owever, you'll 'ave to get your Christmasing by yourself this time or bide without, for I shan't go with ee."

"Don't!" exclaimed Tryphena, her cheeks aflame, her eyes bright as steel—and turning on her heel, marched away up the lane in as pretty a frame of mind as can well be imagined.

But Martha quailed not.

"Let 'em do as they please," thought she, as she returned to her seat by the fire, and rethreaded her needle—she was at work upon those red moreen curtains—"'tis nowt to me, nor will I mix or meddle with it; but seem to agree!—no, not if I were to be tored in pieces by wild 'orses. Patty Tapp may be a clown, but she's no 'ypocrite."

So John manfully lacerated his freckled hands, and imperilled his freckled neck—actually climbing an oak in quest of mistletoe—at the instigation of our tyrant; performed, in short, prodigies of valour for the least possible reward—merely a "Thank you," a "That is quite enough, I think," as bough after bough was riven from its parent stem and consigned to the cart in obedience to suggestions more despotic than commands.

On Christmas Day divine service was to be held at Shobdon in the forenoon. By divine service, I of course mean the service held by Mr. Latchet in the barn.

That any other mode of worship, mode legitimatized by State protection, for instance, and perpetuated by popular carelessness, could by any jugglery of the understanding or maltreatment of conscience be so termed, was, Miss Fowke declared, not only astonishing, but a proof of man's natural depravity, alike welcome and indelible. What the church people did signified to nobody but themselves. They could ring their bells and roar their chants and offer up their printed petitions as seldom or as often as it suited them, or not at all, if

they liked that better; for all the good they got, Aunt Rachel thought that this latter would be the fitter course.

In the old vicar's time it was usual for the carol-singers to make their rounds on Christmas morning between the hours of eight and ten, and then to proceed to church to strengthen the choir, which in good sooth somewhat lacked volume, consisting of a pitchpipe, two old men, and an intermittent boy; but how it would be when this new man came among them, as come he would next Saturday, was more than could be safely prognosticated. His name was Wynter, and his hair was sandy; also he wore glasses. Thus much Aunt Rachel knew from having met him in the village on the day of his induction.

"But I'm not much struck by his looks," observed she, when subsequently detailing this encounter for the benefit of Tryphena and the minister; "and I doubt whether we shall do as well as we have hitherto; those light, long-nosed, pasty-faced creatures are always so fond of meddling. Besides, if poor old Dr. Wasborough was free in his way of talking, and

did now and then take more wine than was good for him, he was very pleasant-spoken, and gave right and left; but we shall see. After all, we're our own landlord."

At eleven a.m. on Christmas morning, then, the barn doors would be thrown open to all who, in an earnest and prayerful spirit, and enviable immunity from household cares, could conscientiously assemble themselves together to hear the oft-told story, and sanctify, by the renewal of pious emotions, those carnal appetites, to the satisfaction of which, circumstances being favourable, the remainder of the day would be devoted.

"You'll go, of course," said Aunt Rachel to Tryphena, as that untiring being mounted a pair of steps on Saturday afternoon, hammer and mistletoe bough in hand, a great nail between her teeth, bent on the arrangement of the said trophy over the door leading to the hall; she had been decorating the kitchen; "and so will your father. As for me, I must stay at home and attend to the dinner. I suppose Martha knows that she is to come and help as usual?"

Tryphena plied her hammer vigorously. That mistletoe bough had weathered many winters—a toughening process.

"I do not know what she knows," observed she grimly, when the nail was driven home; "nor do I care."

"Indeed!" said Miss Fowke.

"Martha," pursued the girl, throwing back her head, and assuming the air of a critic, "has taken upon herself to be exceedingly rude to me of late, and—and—I am not going to put up with it."

"Indeed!" said Aunt Rachel again; "perhaps you'll be good enough just to get a broom and clear up all this mess you've been making. 'Pon my word, one would think you were the Queen of Sheba."

"If I were," was the smiling answer, "I should have some trouble to find a Solomon, I fancy. But it does look nice, doesn't it?"

"Yes," was the composed answer, accompanied by an upward glance, "'tis all very well."

"I wish," continued Tryphena, picking up

sundry sticks and twigs, "that this sort of work was more plentiful. Now, how pleasant it would be to be a gardener—not a man who plants cabbages, you know, but a grand person like Mr. Graham at Evershot—and to have to arrange all the nosegays, and see that the fruit was proper for dessert. Oh, I should like that!"

"It seems to me," said Miss Fowké, "that you would like anything better than the plain duties which lie before you. Why can't you be content with what you've got?"

Tryphena smiled.

"I can't help my nature," she rejoined; "it is meat and drink to me to see pretty things. I do not want them to be grand, or out of the way; a bird's song on a fine day, or a flower growing in the hedge, gives me just as much pleasure as the finest of pictures or statues—indeed more, I think. But to brighten up places I am fond of, and make them what I——"

"Ah!" said Aunt Rachel, "you're your mother all over. That was just what she was always whining about. Why didn't we let

the ivy grow? Why didn't we have a new carpet in the parlour and pictures instead of samplers? Why this, why that; it used to make me wild to listen to her—pack of boarding-school nonsense!"

"But," argued Phenie, "I have not been to a boarding-school. Besides, I do not believe that our opinions are put into us. They grow as we grow. Robert says so. Robert says that——"

"Robert's a terrible wise fellow!" was the sarcastic interpolation. "When you and Robert get a place to yourselves we shall no doubt learn something!"

"Ah," smiled Tryphena, "when!" she had no great stock of hope.

So, when the morning came, the morning with its bell-ringing, carol-singing, cider-drinking (Mr. Fowke always broached a barrel with his own hands on Christmas Eve; so had his father done before him, and his father's father, an hereditary custom, if you please), its rough courtesies and maddening bustle, Miss Fanciful put on her puce silk and her green pelisse and her new green bonnet,

and tripped off to meeting as blithe as you could wish, for the sun shone and the world looked bright, and she felt quite in birthday trim.

But one fact there was which slightly marred her happiness—Mr. Fowke wore his week-day clothes.

"You're never going out that figure!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, as she hurried into the kitchen, saucepan in hand, hair curl-papered, face expressive alike of dismay and a sense of injury, just as they were about to start.

"What figure?" rejoined he, placidly.

"Why, all rags and tatters! Tryphena, go and fetch your father his best coat this instant. The idea of your thinking you could be seen like that! Come, be sharp—get it off!"

"Stuff!" rejoined he—"I want no best coat—I'm not going to Court!" and strode away therewith.

"Well, to be sure!" ejaculated Aunt Rachel.

Never had Fowke so forgotten himself since Fowkes were, with the exception of Cracked Tom, who would always dress like a sailor, and wear a pigtail, to the mortification of his

relations and amusement of the neighbours, say to him what you would.

"I think the world's fair topsy-turvy!" exclaimed this outraged lady, turning to Martha, who was making up the fire, "first one thing and then another; one might as well live in Bedlam."

But to this somewhat hazardous assertion Martha vouchsafed no answer. She was indeed disposed to silence, if not taciturnity, that morning, going about her work with a settled sobriety of face and manner which might have given rise to conjecture, had not interests of a more active order been so plentiful.

To be long uneasy, or even preoccupied, however, in the midst of cheerfulness—cheerfulness which evinced itself by dint of much and hearty hand-shaking, voluble utterance of good wishes, loving smiles—was quite beyond Tryphena, she being of a receptive nature, and as impressionable as retentive of impressions. Moreover, when she came to think of it, as think she did, notably during that quiet ten minutes which elapsed between their taking their seats and the minister's arrival,

there was a reason for this sudden departure from established custom.

"'Twas on Christmas Eve that mother died," pondered the girl, as she gazed up at the garlanded walls, "and he may have dreamt of her last night. I fancied he seemed dull all the evening. 'Tis but natural that he should dislike trouble about outside things, when his soul is full of heaviness;" and then she felt quite ashamed of her new bonnet, and blushed on such wise that Mr. Latchet happening to enter at that moment, was persuaded she had recognized his step as he came up the road, and thrilled joyously. Poor Mr. Latchet!

The service over—no finer sermon had ever been listened to, or could possibly ever be listened to, either at Shobdon or anywhere else, not in the king's chapel itself, asserted the popular voice, than that delivered by Acts on this occasion, and the text whereof ran "There was not room for them in the inn:" a passage which affording scope to the imagination, admitted of pictorial treatment at once dazzling and sublime;—service over, I say, Jacob left his seat, and strolled, his hands

clasped behind him, to the west end of the barn.

"Looks comfortable, don't it?" shouted he to the minister, who had just risen from his knees, his face still bright with that strange brightness which it would wear when dwelling on a theme which pleased him, or, suddenly transported by freshness of view, a brightness quite superhuman, people said.

Tryphena shivered. Perhaps she felt cold. The congregation had vanished.

Mr. Latchet, however, betrayed no sense of incongruity. Pocketing his Bible, and closing that ordained for public use, also the hymn-book, he stepped down from the desk and made his way towards his interlocutor, with quite delightful promptitude.

"An improvement?" quoth that gentleman, his hands in his coat pockets, his eyes roving here and there.

"Very great," replied Acts; "you must have worked hard, Miss Tryphena."

"John helped me," she answered, coming towards them; "he put up all those bunches of evergreens," pointing to certain green sheaves dotted about the roof; "they are

hooked on to nails. I can't think how he did it!"

"John!" echoed Acts—"not Martha?"

"No," smiled Tryphena; "Martha could not very well get up there. We had to tie two ladders together. Besides, she is cross. She would not even go with me to the down."

"Would not go with you to the down!" repeated Jacob. "What was that for?"

"Oh, I don't know," smiled our tale-bearer, looking down at her toes. "Something has put her out, I suppose; but she'll come round again."

"She'd better," was the dry response, "unless she wants to have an empty cupboard next Easter!"

"I think," said Acts, deprecatorily—"indeed I have always thought—that you have made a little too much of that young woman. It is well to——"

"Martha is my friend," broke forth Tryphena; "she has been good to me ever since I was born. How can I make too much of her? It is impossible! And she loves me just as well as ever, though she may be rather——"

"My dear child," interposed Acts, gently, "you were saying yourself that——"

"I dare say I was," snapped the dear child.

Jacob laughed, and threw back his head, as if enjoying himself.

"My word!" said he; "you'd better mind your p's and q's, sir!"

And Acts laughed too, just a little awkwardly; but Tryphena walked quickly to the door. Oh, if one had but been born deaf and dumb! What good did one get by hearing? What harm wrought not one by speech?

"'Tis that new hat, I believe," observed Mr. Fowke, as they strolled towards the Grange, "that's set you up so. What do you think of it, Latchet? Think it suits her? 'Twon't be worn out, I dare say, before——"

"I think it worthy of the face it shrines!" interrupted Acts, quickly.

"See my old coat?" pursued Jacob, holding out a shabby arm and laughing dryly. "Rachel was ready to tear my eyes out because I wouldn't change it for a better; but where's the use? 'Twill be all one soon. The worms won't suffer."

"Besides," smiled Acts, "there is nothing

the matter with it that I can see. What do you say, Miss Tryphena?"

But Miss Tryphena said nothing.

She was lost in sad wonder. How was it that she always gave people credit for thinking so much more beautifully than they really did?

CHAPTER V.

WITH REFERENCE TO A DAY.

ARRIVED at the Grange—through the parlour window might be espied the jovial face of a bright fire, Tryphena having, by dint of great energy and quite heroic perseverance, succeeded in the conquest of prejudice and extortion of a promise from Aunt Rachel that for once custom should be set aside and use made of that somewhat prim temple of luxury before January the first—the minister was straightway conducted thither, and furthermore requested to make himself quite at home till such time as dinner should be ready—an operation in the performance of which Mr. Fowke declared himself ready to assist, it being easier managed by two than one—Miss Fowke was dressing.

"How long do you think aunt will be, Martha?" inquired Tryphena, pausing at the kitchen door on her way upstairs, instigated by a weak and even morbid curiosity concerning the state of, first, the turkey, and, secondly, Miss Tapp's temper.

"How can I tell?" responded that young woman, sourly, opening the well of a stupendous dripping-pan with an iron spoon and much racket; "and what does it signify?"

"Oh, nothing! Only Mr. Latchet is in the parlour, and——"

"You'd better go back to 'im," interposed Martha; "I don't want you botherin' in 'ere. I've got my work to do."

"I dare say you have," was the aggrieved answer; "but you need not be so rude all the same;" and red-cheeked, her eyes full of tears, the girl turned herself about, and sought her room.

It was indeed very unkind of Martha to be so sharp with her, for what had she done to deserve such harshness? I can tell you this silly little shuttlecock of a person had what is technically termed a good cry over her self-sought humiliation. "Just see if I go near

her again," thought she, indignantly; "to speak to me like that, and when I had been taking her part, too!" and again gushed forth the waters of affliction, in obedience to the rod of hurt self-esteem.

"She is just as weak as water," mused meanwhile that vigorous Martha, as she basted the festive bird, and danced attendance on the pudding—John's Christmas board would be spread by a neighbour—"and she'll run into any shape you like to put her in; and I've no patience with her."

Had Miss Tapp been denied the man of her affections, she would have snapped her fingers in the face of those who said her nay, and been off to Gretna before you could turn round. And like most impulsive persons — persons endowed with what is technically termed strength of character,—having but a restricted idea of right, and not too much tenderness for the peculiarities of others—this is what she would have liked Miss Phenie to do. Robert had excited her admiration more powerfully than any man since Will went to the wars. He had a grand way with him, she declared,

which somehow gave everything he did and said a special value. 'Twasn't that he said very much, or tried to attract your attention, or seem above you on any wise; but there it was—he was above you; and not above you only, but above all the people you had ever met, or would ever meet, so long as you might live. And then his smile, and his beautiful frilled shirts, and white hands. "She should show more spirit," thought Martha; "she should up and say, 'Look you 'ere, fayther, I've got my life to live as well as you've yours, and I'm not goin' to let it be ruined. You give us your consent, or I'll be married without it!' If she stood to 'er guns, as old Betty Spurrell used to say, like that, the maister 'd give in."

Her pretty eyes bathed back to something like their normal condition, and her hair made smooth—she fancied green did become her a little, if only Robert could give his opinion, he had such taste,—her hair made smooth, I say, the innocent occasion of all this heart-burning betook herself to Aunt Rachel's bedroom to ascertain how near that lady's toilette approached completion, also whether she could be of service. But scarcely had she turned

into the passage which led to that chaste apartment, when the door opened and Miss Fowke appeared in full festal livery—brown satin, gold watch and watch chain, tambour collar, ringlets, velvet band, best cap, dignified, even august bearing, and all.

"Well," said she, smilingly, "and what do you want?" emphasizing "you" with agreeable playfulness.

"I thought you might be hurried, and that I could help you," was the meek reply. "How nice you look!"

Aunt Rachel coughed.

"I had some ado," said she "to get dressed at all, for as I was cutting bread for the bread sauce, the knife slipped and caught the tip of this finger," holding up the injured member; "and the trouble it's given me! But have you been crying?"

Tryphena blinked guiltily.

"I do feel rather dull," admitted she; "I always do on Christmas Day. I get thinking about mother, and one thing and another."

"Your mother," returned Aunt Rachel, "was a poor weak creature, with no more idea of bringing up a family than I have of driving

a coach and four; not so much, perhaps. I do not see what good you would have got by her being spared."

"She was my mother."

"Ah," said Miss Fowke, "young folks are so shortsighted. They never see that if you move one thing you must move all the rest. You can't lay your finger on a circumstance and say, 'Let that be otherwise, and everything else remain as it is.' Change is like a dropped stitch in a stocking—once set going 'tisn't so easily picked up again. Did the minister come in with you?"

"Yes," said Phenie; "he is in the parlour, talking to father;" and they rustled on downstairs.

As they neared the hall, the sound of voices, hitherto little more than a hoarse murmur, grew louder—so loud, indeed, as to suggest argument if not dispute.

"Dear me!" said Aunt Rachel; "they seem very warm. I wonder if it's the chapel they're talking about. I thought Mr. Latchet wouldn't like the notion of deal seats. Why"—opening the door—"are you two quarrelling? You'll quite spoil your appetites."

Mr. Fowke, who was standing with his back to the fire, growled—

"Appetite be hanged!"

But Acts came forward, and shook hands, and smiled, and said little seasonable sayings, and did his best to maintain that reputation for urbanity which, as an article of commerce, is, I find, about as lucrative as anything not absolutely fabulous. It was not his habit to allow himself to be inconvenienced by the blunders of his inferiors.

"We were," observed he, blandly, "dallying with that time-honoured trap for reason, the relationship of free will to——"

"That's a lie!" enounced Jacob.

A sudden flush betrayed that Mr. Latchet could still feel on occasion.

"Jacob!" remonstrated Aunt Rachel.

"Well," said he, coolly, "'tis. We were no more talking of free will than you're thirty."

Miss Fowke's face gloomed over. Really to be in the same room with this man and brother was as great a trial of fortitude as to have strayed into the midst of a bramble thicket—you got hurt at every turn. For a

brief space there was silence. Then she inquired, in the tone of one who wished to make rough places smooth, what sort of a congregation they had had.

But the minister was in no haste to answer, and when he did only said "Tolerable." It was plain that he felt himself insulted,—and who could wonder? An angel might be excused for resenting such unprovoked rudeness. Of a truth, one had better be like them that are wounded, and lie in the grave, than live on in this heathenish way, with never an hour's peace or comfort from year's end to year's end, no matter what the season, or how great the cause for thankfulness and the outpouring of sympathy. As a believer and pilgrim, likewise the bondmaid of principle, Aunt Rachel could not but feel that she had good cause for annoyance.

Tryphena meanwhile took refuge in the family Bible, a large and dingy volume, which habitually reposed upon the parlour table; and to note the avidity with which she searched for one discoloured engraving after another, you would have thought that Christmas Day was the sole occasion on which she was per-

mitted access to these treasures, whereas she had been therewith familiar from a child; but to tell the truth, she greatly feared being spoken to, knowing well that the stoppers once removed, vials of wrath had an odd knack of emptying themselves over her as inexplicable as disagreeable.

The last picture, representing the Suicide of Judas, with full and fine attention to detail, dwelt upon, to turn to the fly-leaf, with its faded inscriptions—inscriptions telling how in the year of grace 1760, Jacob Fowke married Rachel, the daughter of Abel and Sophia Gussage, of Bridport, of which marriage there were issue Jacob, born 1762; Peter, born 1764, died 1770; Henry, born 1770, died 1777; Rachel, born 1778—seemed a matter of course, and to the fly-leaf she turned, gladly enough. Yes, there it all was. All the joy, all the sorrow—this word written boldly, by fingers still tingling with the strong clasp of love, that scarce legible, irregular as though scrawled after dark. "It seems to me," thought Tryphena, soberly, "that a great deal is here said in a very little;" and then her eyes wandered on to the record of her own

birth. Still quite black and new-looking, and——

"What are you about?" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, sharply—"peeping and prying after what does not concern you!"

"I was only seeing when——" commenced the culprit.

"Only seeing!" retorted Miss Fowke; and would no doubt have uttered with her wonted freedom had not Martha just then announced that the dinner was served, whereupon they all departed to the kitchen, the minister and Aunt Rachel arm-in-arm — a circumstance which seemed to afford Mr. Fowke considerable amusement, he winking at Tryphena, and pointing, and otherwise adding in no small degree to the discomfort and trepidation of that misunderstood young person.

The covers removed, the carving-knife sharpened, elbow-room secured, and a blessing requested, to which petition Aunt Rachel said "Amen" in her best manner, Jacob's spirits rose, as was very generally the case with those occult and evanescent agencies when savoury meats met his view, specially when sense of success fed pride while appetite de-

clined. For, to produce a delicious morsel, or force a delicious morsel to produce itself, by dint of sheer native ability, and then to eat it —what were the triumphs of your Pitts and Chathams, your Wellingtons and Nelsons, compared to that? Mr. Fowke's spirits rose.

"I tell ye what," said he, jubilantly, as he cut off a pinion, "'tisn't everybody that can sit down to such a dinner as this, Christmas or no Christmas. You may think yourself lucky, my good sir!"

"I do," smiled Acts, who was distributing the tongue, superb with frill and glaze; "but not wholly on that account."

He had, indeed, quite recovered his equanimity. This day twelvemonth he would have his little dinner-party, his sprigs of holly, his daintily-twined laurel-wreath and bough of mistletoe—a balmy and comforting reflection.

Aunt Rachel straightened her tumbler.

"I only hope," remarked she, "that I did not put too much cayenne in the stuffing, for just as I was measuring it out, a rat got caught in the gin, and its squeaks quite flur-

ried me. By-the-way, Martha, what became of the beast? I hope you killed it!"

"No, 'm, I didn't," said Martha, who was playing parlour-maid, "for it 'ad got off before I'd time to see to it, but I think 'twas 'urt a good bit, because there were red marks on the sawdust."

"Dear!" exclaimed Tryphena, "how horrid! Poor creature. Perhaps at this very moment, while we are enjoying ourselves, it is suffering the most terrible agonies."

"A good thing, too!" responded Miss Fowke; "teach it not to come poking about in my larder spoiling things."

"You should have set your foot on its head," smiled our host; "that's the way I serve 'em! Well, Mrs. Beauty, what do you want? Got any cider, Martha?"

"I have not yet wished you a merry Christmas, Martha," observed the minister, as she filled his glass.

"You needn't trouble, sir!" was the dry rejoinder.

Acts raised his eyebrows, and seemed again about to lapse into abstraction, but this soon passed off. Before the plum-pudding had

made its appearance, dight of blue flames, holly-crowned, he was as brisk, as genial as ever. Truly, it was not possible for a man's digestive organs—those springs of fancy, regulators of mood — to long withstand the soothing influences just then abroad.

"And now," said Jacob, leaning back luxuriously before attacking the weighty question of fresh supplies, "let's have a glass of wine. Rachel, pass the decanter."

"Permit me," smiled Mr. Latchet, removing the stopper, and eying her wine-glass.

"No, thank you," she replied, "I will wait until dessert. Port does not agree with me too well."

"Glad to hear that," said Mr. Fowke; "there'll be all the more left for us. Latchet, help yourself. How's the pudding, Phenie?"

"I think it is very good," she said, "so far as I can judge."

"Ah!" smiled Jacob, "I wonder what sort of a one yours 'll be!"

"Mine?" echoed she; whereat the master laughed and looked hard at the minister, and having succeeded in attracting that gentle-

man's attention, laughed again, and went to work with his spoon manfully, with a sudden zest quite unaccountable. Tryphena marvelled.

"I don't think," observed Aunt Rachel suavely, and, as if she understood it all, which added not a little to our young friend's astonishment, "that you would find any difficulty in following the receipt that I should give you."

"Which is that?" inquired Acts, his eyes bent on his plate, the corners of his mouth a thought tremulous; "the same from which this is made?"

"Yes," replied Miss Fowke, "it is one that mother had from a friend of hers, who, before she married, was housekeeper to the Duke of Hardwicke, and I like it better than the others I have because it binds so well."

"Ah!" said Acts, and helped himself to sweet sauce.

"Where are we to have the dessert?" inquired Jacob, as Martha set on the cheese, her cheeks very red, the expression of her face grave to severity—the very grimmest of handmaidens was she to-day, had she been serving

funeral meats she could not have been grimmer—"here or in the parlour?"

"In the parlour," replied Aunt Rachel; "we've grown so polite of late," with a sly glance at Tryphena.

"Ay," said Jacob; "but 'twill wear off."

Acts smiled.

"Still," pursued Miss Fowke, "though I can't abide nonsense, I won't say that it isn't pleasant to make a little change sometimes."

"For instance," smiled Jacob, "to spend the evening with Latchet."

"Yes," said she, "most certainly."

"In that case," observed the minister, "I hope you will very often pay me a visit. I can assure you the pleasure is quite reciprocal."

"Besides," continued Mr. Fowke, "by-and-by you may get something fresh to show folks—something a little out of the common, attractive."

Aunt Rachel cast down her eyes.

"If you've finished," said she, "I think we may as well make a move. Have you seen to the fire, Martha?"

"Yes, 'm," responded Martha, and up they got.

"For these and all——" commenced Acts, but a crumb stuck in his throat. Wiping the tears from his eyes, he huskily coughed out the remainder of the thanksgiving.

"Good thing," muttered Martha to herself, as she cleared the table, the company having withdrawn, "if 'e'd choked 'isself entirely—saved the 'angman trouble, I'll warrant!" and spurned his chair, as though it were unfit for an honest woman to handle.

Re-ensconced in the parlour, a pleasing conviction of having for once effectually gagged comment, and acted with generosity commensurate with circumstance, seemed to pervade Mr. Fowke's sensorium.

"Come, now," exclaimed he, balancing his wineglass between his fingers; Aunt Rachel watched him with eyes made keen of terror—it was one of the rose-cut half-dozen that was presented to him by Mrs. Gussage on his marriage, and you couldn't match them, no, not at Newcastle;—"come, now! You can't say but what I've given you a good dinner—as good a dinner as any man need care to sit down to?"

Acts shook his head.

"Too good, I'm afraid," smiled he—"for my personal well-being, at least."

"You've eaten too much," laughed Jacob. "I like that. Nothing pleases me better than to set a trap for folks and see 'em tumble into it; particularly when they set up to be extra knowing. But, I've given you a good dinner that you'll allow, and now I'll give you a good toast. Here," rising to his feet, and holding up the said rose-cut wine-glass, the which he had filled whilst speaking, "is to our future relationship."

"To our future relationship!" echoed Acts, and tossed off a bumper gallantly.

Aunt Rachel blushed to the roots of her hair. Nay, her very hands took a ruddier tinge as she sipped acceptance.

Tryphena sat white and motionless.

"Well," said her father, eying her icily—"why don't you drink?"

But she held her peace.

He smiled.

There was an awkward silence, broken only by the drumming of five horny fingers on the rosewood table. Then Mr. Fowke coughed,

straightened himself up, and pulling down his waistcoat, observed:

"Perhaps it may not be known to you that the minister has expressed himself desirous of becoming my"—(Aunt Rachel looked at her watch)—"son-in-law."

The header was taken. All you had to do now was to come to the surface, gasp, pant, and find out how you liked it.

Miss Fowke gasped a good deal.

But she made no outcry—she only finished her wine.

"I will not let him see," thought she—"I will die sooner."

A strong woman up to that moment, a strong woman still, was our friend Rachel. And Tryphena? Tryphena prayed—prayed hard for deliverance, strength, that her Heavenly Father would, in His great goodness, vouchsafe to interfere on her behalf, to mitigate the tyranny of her oppressors, and change their hearts. Yes, very hard, indeed, with all her might, did this poor thing pray.

"Well," said Mr. Fowke, at length, finding that no one spoke—neither the women out of curiosity, nor Acts to plead his cause—

"haven't you got any observation to offer? Ain't you surprised—pleased——"

"I am surprised, certainly," said Aunt Rachel, coldly.

Jacob smiled.

"And you?" said he, turning to Tryphena—"you who are chiefly concerned. Are you struck dumb too?"

She sighed.

"I don't see the good of speaking," replied she, sadly; "Mr. Latchet is already aware of my sentiments."

"Indeed," sneered Jacob; "but what if I say damn your sentiments! what if I bid you just chuck your sentiments to the wind, and be an honest man's wife when he asks you? What then?"

"Then," replied the girl, firmly, "I should be so unfortunate as to have to disobey you, for be the wife of any man but him to whom my word is given I never will, do to me what you may!"

Mr. Fowke's lips lessened. He looked at Acts, who looked at him—despondently.

"Pshaw!" ejaculated our negotiator; "be downhearted at a maid's stubbornness! You

must be less of a man than I've took you for. She may talk—let her. What's talk?"

"But it's not talk!" exclaimed Tryphena, "it's truth. Aunt Rachel, speak for me; tell father how——"

But Aunt Rachel turned away her head.

"It's nothing to me," said she, coldly; "you must settle it among you. If you had not given Mr. Latchet encouragement I do not see how he could have ever thought of such a thing!"—not without intention.

Over Tryphena's face crept that look of utter hopelessness which it wore one Thursday evening now ten days ago.

Truly she stood quite alone in her great desolation—a gazing-stock and raree show, an object of hatred and contempt to all who, wagging their heads, turned aside to look on her. It was a bitter experience.

Acts rose to his feet.

"What's that for?" exclaimed Jacob. "You're never going to let yourself be upset by that young minx? Just you wait a bit. People don't get the better of me in a hurry—unless I see cause." These last four words slowly, with ugly emphasis.

"I do not think," said Acts calmly, "that I can do any good by staying. Moreover, there is a certain indelicacy in the situation, to my mind—if I may be permitted so to express myself."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Tryphena, made quite desperate by misery.

"You hold your tongue!" commanded Jacob; "I'll warrant the minister's better aware of his meaning than you are of yours. Well, sir," quitting his seat, and turning to that gentleman with happy deference, "if you must go you must; but mind," with weight, resting his hands on the table, "I know of no occasion."

"Thank you," said Acts, and seemed to hesitate. "I hope," pursued he, at length, "that this unlooked-for revelation of my wishes—unlooked for, inasmuch as——"

"You're old enough to be the girl's father!" burst forth Aunt Rachel, with the vehemence of a suddenly irrupt volcano.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Jacob—"ha! ha! ha!"

"What's there to laugh at?" demanded she, fiercely; "I do but speak the truth."

But Jacob laughed on.

"Good-afternoon," said the minister, and hurriedly sought the door. The indelicacy of the situation became startling — poignant. How could a man ever attain the least beauty of outline in the mind of a girl who——

"Stay!" exclaimed Mr. Fowke, "there's no need for you to rush away like that. I want to show you the black sow," and he followed Acts into the hall.

"Oh, aunt!" sighed Tryphena, when the coast was clear, "you don't think I am to blame?"

"I don't know," was the dubious answer, "I can't tell what to think; but I felt sure that that coat meant something!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHERE THE SLAVE CEASES.

HE evening passed and Boxing-day came in sad tranquillity. It was not Mr. Fowke's habit to rail when once his mind was spoken, and Aunt Rachel was far too busy in rearranging her disordered convictions to have time for speech other than essential. She felt, poor woman, much as might a hybernating insect, who, having established herself in snug winter quarters, and fallen pleasantly asleep, had suddenly, owing to the mischievous activity of some dreadful gardener, amateur or otherwise, been roused to full sense of cold and emptiness, and thrust forth to perish miserably on the irresponsive bosom of a wintry earth.

To scuttle off in search of fresh shelter as

quickly as possible would, I have no doubt, seem the only reasonable course of action to one so situated; and insensibly (her mental vision, usually so keen, being dimmed by anger) Miss Fowke's thoughts assumed this complexion; but once houseless it is not so easy to find a home—a home to your liking, that is, and weather-proof.

Aunt Rachel and this familiar truth were soon on terms of the closest intimacy.

On Christmas-night it was customary for the Tapps—mother, father, sons, and daughters—to come to tea at the Grange. A cake, and a good one, would be provided for their entertainment, and licence was understood to be not only the accident but the order of the hour. Nor did this periodical high tide of liberality date from the assumption by John of matrimonial honours. He had himself, when a ruddy-cheeked, smock-frocked scarer of birds and embryo ploughman, looked forward to, and talked about, and regretted those slices of deliciousness, those cupfulls of ecstasy, wherewith it was old Mrs. Fowke's pleasure that he should be regaled on such occasions. "For," said the old lady, who was but a Gussage,

"thou art a good lad, John, and if thou grow'st up as thou'st begun thou'lt be a good man; so eat away, lad, and take more sugar in thy tea. I do love to see young folks happy." And as you, being by this time habituated to the Grange atmosphere, have doubtless already apprehended, Tryphena—Tryphena in cap and robe; Tryphena short-coated; Tryphena in the little black silk frock with three crape tucks and a white frill round the neck and sleeves, which she wore as mourning for her mother; Tryphena in her first long gown; Tryphena with her sweet eyes, her pretty smiles, her quiet, tender ways—was as important an item in the night's programme as the teapot itself, or "Hark! the herald angels sing," which gem of hymnody John would pour forth towards the close of the proceedings, rising to his feet for that purpose, and with great solemnity—having taken a pinch of snuff—declaring that "'e didn't know if 'e could get through with it, for 'is voice weer very bad, but 'e'd troy, just to please 'em!" and then quavering off in a style which——

But, I wander. What does it matter to you,

or anybody, how an ignorant and toil-worn old labourer, well-nigh as brown as the earth he tended, made melody in his heart to the Lord in a farmhouse kitchen? On this particular evening, however—the most dismal, I think, save that immediately succeeding young Mrs. Fowke's death, which the Grange had yet known—though John duly made his appearance at the back-door, attired in his blue coat with brass buttons, and beaver hat, corduroy knee breeches, blue woollen stockings, and best shoes, as the church clock struck four, just half an hour after the minister had left, there was no "Hark! the herald." For Miss Phenie had betaken herself to her own room, where, wrapped in her tartan cloak, her right elbow resting on her knee, her cheek pillowed on the palm of her right hand—cheek and palm between which lay hidden a big locketsprent with pearls, holding a bit of bright curling hair—she wofully did sit, engaged in the solution of problems of varied difficulty, among which "Why was I born?" maintained its wonted prominence—and Miss Rachel had a headache; and to be merry or vocal, or in any way different to one's work-a-day self,

save in the matters of garb and eating, was indeed quite beyond a man—even a man who had been sober and industrious all his life, and knew where to lay his hand on a pound or two if he should happen to want them. John smoked in silence.

"It do seem very quiet," remarked he, at length, knocking the ashes out of his pipe; "a'most"—meditatively—"as though some one weer dead."

"So some one is," smiled Martha, her eyes bent upon the fire.

John stared.

"Oo's that?" questioned he.

"Love," replied she; whereat this rustic gentleman shot out his lips and raised his brows, and facially expressed doubt to the best of his ability. Patty talked queer at times.

"Love," said he, after a bit, "takes a vast sight o' killin'. That's why, I 'spect, 'tis nowt better nor a weed, if you could but know the right's o't."

And this was all that passed till Aunt Rachel, red-eyed and subdued, came to bid them good-night, and hope that John had had

all he wanted; to which aspiration John replied that "'e'd done capital, 'cept 'e should a been glad to 'ave 'ad a chat wi' Miss Phenie, but 'e supposed she'd gone to bed."

And Aunt Rachel supposed so too, supposed so severely with chill indifference, which, by some inexplicable centralization of conflicting causes, fanned the wrath still smouldering in a certain bosom to such a pitch of fiery violence that it was a wonder it did not break bounds altogether; but it did not, and this day of tempest ended pianissimo.

Between Tryphena and Miss Fowke, however, the gulf which had thus suddenly yawned was far too wide, too black and terrible, to admit of being bridged over either by the frail web of relationship, or the stronger chain of self-discipline; moreover, from the interior of the chasm issued such stenches, rumblings, and reports as might well scare the boldest, sicken the least squeamish; also, as the past, illuminated by the light of the present, defiled in set scenes, a procession of tableaux vivants before the mind's eye, hidden meanings started into view, events hitherto vague and tremulous, shrank into solid proofs of perfidy with

a rapidity in itself not a little detrimental to all chances of reconciliation.

"I understand now," thought Aunt Rachel, as she lay upon her bed waking, and watered her couch with tears, "why she cared so little about Isaac's having given up that letter, why she didn't tell me that he walked home with her from Mrs. Bond's," and sobbed with fresh vehemence. One could sob at one's ease under the bedclothes, shut in by four walls; no one could make merry at one's expense—take advantage of one's weakness so fortified; one's sufferings, however, were just as acute as though exposed to a million sarcasms, the cause of those sufferings just as abominable. Without a doubt, Miss Fowke was, in her own opinion, a most villanously-treated and pitiable person. To directly express this belief, however, to say either in so many words or by such and such movements, whether of the head, features, arms, legs, or adjacent objects, "I have been shamefully dealt by, I have been wronged on such wise that your life—I mean your death—would be a poor atonement," was contrary alike to her intention and inclination. If at the supreme moment when, shaken by

a blow so brutal that but to think thereof was appalling, sense staggered, she had contrived, at the expense of mental anguish and half a glass of port wine, to maintain a decent composure, surely she could continue so to vindicate her claims to respect, if not affection, when the lapse of time had cooled her wounds, and mitigated to a certain degree the poignancy of her malady. No change, therefore, was perceptible either in the face or manner of this determined person when she made her appearance on Monday morning, save that she seemed averse to speech, and never once looked at Tryphena, addressing her when she had occasion in a dry, hard measured tone, not unlike that which a judge might fitly adopt when informing a notorious malefactor that at length his crimes were about to meet their deserts, and that he would do well to prepare to appear before that dread —etcetera, etcetera. Tryphena bore with this as with her other trials quite patiently. "For," mused she, "it is very natural that she should feel vexed with me, though, indeed, I am not to blame, not nearly so much as Mr. Latchet, because when a girl tells

a man that she cannot care for him, he ought to be content; but I always do wrong, it would be a wonder indeed if I were not in fault!" this smiling a little bitterly.

By degrees, though, as the day advanced, and action quickened the circulation of ideas, it dawned upon our analyst that there was after all scanty cause for the exhibition of such vexation. Aunt Rachel had really no right to be so disagreeable about a matter which affected her personally little more than would a change of dynasty in Japan, or a difference between the planet Jupiter and its satellites.

"It is I who have to suffer," thought Tryphena—"and I alone. Why need she try to add to my unhappiness? She ought rather to advise and comfort me. Surely she cannot imagine that—— Aunt!" she exclaimed, all of a sudden, "I do wish you'd not be so stiff. I can't think whatever is the matter with you."

Miss Fowke's lip curled—she could sneer as well as Jacob when she had a mind to make use of that mode of expression.

"I'm sure, pursued the girl, getting red.

and plaiting up the hem of her apron, "I've done nothing to make you cross—that I know of, at least; and if I have, if you will tell me what it is, I will beg your pardon, and try to set it straight immediately. I can't bear to——"

"Get on with your work," exclaimed Aunt Rachel. "I want no cant. I like uprightness."

"And so do I!" responded Tryphena; "and as far as I have been able I have been upright; but I can't help other people. I can't——"

"No, of course not!" was the sarcastic interruption; "You're such a beauty. Folks lose their senses if they do but look at you. Why, 'tis a wonder the sun don't come down out of heaven to pay you court!"—laughing scornfully.

Tryphena's eyes opened wide as the two finest blossoms of my blue cineraria.

"Dear me!" observed she, at length, "this is something quite new."

"Aye," said Aunt Rachel, "you're right. 'Tis indeed new for chits of girls scarce out of pinafores to make fools of men old enough to

be their fathers. But I'm not going to talk to you. You've played your game, and you've acted out all your hypocrisies, and now——"

"Stay!" exclaimed Tryphena—"what hypocrisies have I acted? and what game have I played? I am not to blame because Mr. Latchet has seen fit to—to fall in love with me. I have refused him without words over and over again, and once I actually said to his face that I would never be his wife, and that long before Robert asked me. Yes, you may accuse me in your own mind of telling an untruth, but it is quite true. It was that day I walked to Coatham. I met him at the top of Kittock Hill, and we sat down, and then he said that—that he cared for me."

"What business had you to sit down?" demanded Aunt Rachel, fiercely—"tempting the man to——"

"That does not matter," returned Tryphena, "sit down we did, and say that he loved me he did, and tell him that I never could love him I did. You shall not accuse me of—of such——"

"I shall accuse you," retorted Miss Fowke, "of whatever I choose. Do you think I'm going to be set down and pooh-poohed by a pert young cat like you. Say another word and I'll slap your face, as sure as my name's Rachel!"

"Will you?" cried Phenie, "will you? You touch me if you dare!—if you dare!" stamping her foot quite maniacally.

Aunt Rachel gazed at her almost as though she derived amusement from her violence.

"Well," remarked she, at length, "you're a nice creature to have brought up, and worked for, and harassed one self about from morning to night, till the very flesh is——"

"I don't care," said the girl, desperately, "I don't care one bit. What does it matter that you tyrannized over me when I was a child, and frightened me to death with your stories of hell and the devil, and dried up my life so that it was no better than a stick to chastise me with. You have abused me and thought as ill of me as though I were the vilest wretch cumbering the earth, and now in my sorest necessity you are about to turn

your back on me, and help father to break my heart. Ah, I understand you well enough! And I am not to utter a syllable in self-defence. I am to bear all the indignities you can put upon me as dumbly as if I were a chair or a table"—her voice quivering into a sob. "Oh! it is most unreasonable. I cannot conceive how you can be so pitiless. One would think"——with just a spark of spirit—"that you were in love with the man yourself!"

"One would think——" echoed Miss Fowke, savagely, but there paused.

Jacob stood upon the threshold.

"Heyday," exclaimed he, looking from one to the other—Tryphena's face was buried in her apron—"I thought I heard squeals. But don't mind me. Fight away! When rogues disagree honest men get their own."

Aunt Rachel sniffed disdainfully.

"Honest men indeed!" said she; "I do but know of one such in the world!" and kicked Beauty up on to her poor lean legs with finest alacrity.

That night our old friend Asmodeus, had he been in the neighbourhood of Shobdon, might have chanced to become the possessor

of two secrets, the respective values of which would be difficult to determine, it being, as you know, the special vocation of this hard-worked person, in common with story-tellers, biographers, and political economists, to see through stone walls, upheave roofs, generally make light of obstacles to extended vision otherwise esteemed insuperable.

In the first place, then, he would have beheld (the good Asmodeus is as devoid of modesty as a popular preacher or an unsuccessful playwright) attired in nightcap, flannel bedgown, and red moreen petticoat, and seated in an upper chamber, lit by a flickering rush-light, before a small deal dressing-table, on which lay writing materials, a lady, whose grave and thoughtful expression of countenance, also the manner in which she regarded the pen she had just taken up, plainly declared to be engaged in the transaction of business of no small importance. And making still further calls on his singular power, this prince of detectives would doubtless have discovered this lady's name to be Miss Fowke, likewise the business which thus cruelly robbed her of beauty-sleep, and engrossed her intellectual self none other than the in-

diting of a letter to one Robert Valoynes—a letter setting forth how—— but Asmodeus is a man of honour, he will give you his word. It would shock him terribly to combine tale-bearer with spy.

And then, curiosity being whetted and the spirit of adventure fairly roused, yet another domestic interior might charm the discriminating eye—an interior also ill-lit; an interior whereof the sole occupant is a woman, and that woman's occupation writing—but dissimilar. The one murky with vapour of black thoughts, the other luminous with innocence, the one charged with self-bred bitterness, the other fragrant with simple tenderness; both harbouring trouble, though. And these letters, written in strictest privacy, at dead of night, even as traitorous documents whereof the disclosure must cost head and fame—how warrant they such grave precaution?

See for yourselves.

"From Rachel Fowke to Robert Valoynes.

"Shobdon Grange,
"Monday, December 26th, 1821.

"My dear and still honoured Sir,—It is

with the deepest regret that I pen these few hurried lines, to apprize you of an event which has occasioned me personally no small pain. Yesterday, that was Christmas Day, my brother, we being with the minister seated at dessert, gave out that he, Mr. Latchet, wished to become his son-in-law. Now, it is quite plain to me that whatever Tryphena may say to the contrary, *she must have given him encouragement.* There is no smoke without a fire, and it is not to be supposed that a man of Mr. Latchet's intelligence would have let Jacob say thus much unless he had good grounds for believing that a marriage was possible. Under these circumstances, of which I feel it my duty to make you aware, I cannot but fear that you will find it necessary to withdraw from your engagement — indeed I must *strongly recommend* you so to do, for Tryphena has lately shown herself so sly and untrustworthy that I am sure she would make a shocking bad wife to an honest gentleman like yourself, who sets truth before all things. As I write this my heart misgives me ; but after much and sorrowful reflection I am sure

you should be warned, and so, with the compliments of the season,

"Beg you to believe me,

"Always your sincere well-wisher,

"RACHEL FOWKE."

"From Tryphena Fowke to Robert Valoynes.

"Monday.

"ROBERT,—I am very unhappy, more unhappy than I thought it possible to be about anything, except being away from you. Mr. Latchet wants me to marry him. I never told you—first, because it did not matter; and secondly, because I did not care to seem vain—but he asked me last autumn, and I said no—not on account of you, so don't smile, you proud thing, but because I did not like him *in that way.*

"However, I suppose he thought I was mistaken, for he spoke to father, and father gave out yesterday that he was to be son-in-law. I said at once that that was impossible. But no one took any notice, so there was a great deal of noise and misery; and the result is that aunt and I have had a dredful quarel (she is so very angry that Mr. Latchet is so

stupid as to see anything in me. *I can't quite make that out,* can you ?) ; and I'm about as miserable as a girl need be. But you will not mistrust me, will you, Robert ? you will still believe that I love you only—that I will love you as long as I live. Oh, Robert, if I could but feel your hand in mine—if I could but hear you say ''Phenie !' Do you know, the other day I thought I would put on my oldest clothes, and slip away after dark, and walk, and walk, and walk, till I walked right to Kirton, when I should arive in such a state of dirt and wretchedness that your servants would thrust me out for a tramp ; and then I thought I would cry so loud that the place should ring again : 'But I am Tryphena—Tryphena Fowke—and I was born at Shobdon-cum-Shackerly !' and you would hear me, and run to me, and pick me up, and make such a to-do with me that they would all think you had gone mad ; and then, when—when I was quite happy, I would die—a little. I do not think I should ever have the strenth of mind to die entirely with you to look at me. I do think such funny things sometimes.

"But you will keep on loving me, won't you? Never mind what people say; I am true.

"With all my hart,
"Believe me,
"*Your* TRYPHENA.

"P.S.—I have got a kind of feeling that somebody, I do not know who, will try to make mischif between us. That is why I have written this."

"There!" said Miss Fowke, as she made an end of reading over her composition, and proceeded to reduce it to postable dimensions; "she's dished, I fancy."

"I wonder if I dare ask Martha to lend me a shilling?" mused Tryphena, doing strange things with a wafer; "and my spelling—oh, my spelling!"

CHAPTER VII.

"A LITTLE WASHED-UP DRIFT."

" FANCY," remarked Tryphena, about noon on Tuesday, as she carefully separated the yolk and white of an egg—a brown and beautiful egg, newly laid by Sarah, most meritorious of hens—being engaged in the manufacture of a batter-pudding for Clara Bond, "that it is going to snow. What do you think, aunt?"

But Miss Fowke merely glanced at the window. It might snow or not, just as it pleased, so far as she was concerned.

Before retiring to rest last night—in fact before opening the Bible to read the accustomed chapter, which chapter chanced on this occasion to be taken from the Second Book of Kings, and set forth how Jehu the usurper

dealt with Queen Jezebel—a favourite passage with Aunt Rachel, who loved to see in the murder of Joram's mother a type of the coming destruction of all female worldlings, all tirers of the head and triflers with the rouge pot;—before revealing the familiar beauties of Holy Writ, I say, then, Tryphena had, with a great show of earnestness and even tears, begged to be forgiven, and set forth her contrition, her determination never so to forget herself, her place, her duty again; how that if only she might once more be regarded and spoken to, as though she were at least a feeble imitation of a human creature, and not the contents of the dustbin—she would—she would—she would—— Perhaps you, with the aid of memory, may be able to form some faint idea of the exceeding rash and absurd statements to which this young and frantic person gave utterance.

I can.

Aunt Rachel, however, was little moved by her entreaties, neither did her voluntary self-abasement—for Mr. Fowke had maintained a prominent position on the opposition benches

ever since dinner—win her any favour. "Gratitude's best acted" was the laconic rejoinder, when acknowledgment, copious and fervent, was made of past obligations; "That will do!" froze the weeping assurance of never-to-be diminished affection.

"Lord!" exclaimed Jacob, who up to the coda of this most melancholy and monotonous little nocturne, had wisely held his peace, impressed by the worth of symmetry and sequential development of parts or "voices," as people used to say, once upon a time—"Lord! what's the use of all that blubbering and bother? Can't you see you might as well talk to a vinegar vat? Get on with prayers!"

And Tryphena dried her eyes and got on, and subsequently got down upon her knees, and then got up again, and having said good night huskily, with something less than her usual cheerfulness, got away to her own little room, with what purpose flickering in her mind you already know.

It was indeed a very terrible thing to quarrel with Aunt Rachel.

To-day, however, whether from the sudden growth of an independent interest, the con-

ciousness of having for once come to a decision undirected, or the possession of a secret —a delightful, not exactly guilty, but just a little dangerous secret, (there was never a female child born, I believe, but this instinct of concealment lay hid amidst the dormant energies of her minute mind) Tryphena sustained little inconvenience from the lowness of the domestic temperature. She bustled to and fro, and shook the beds, and whipped the eggs, and cut the remainder of the plum-pudding into slices for frying, and in fact did all that she had to do as briskly as though she were an Arabella Gregory, and had not a care in the world. For one thing it behoved her to be on the alert, for she would be out the best part of the afternoon, and for another—but patience!

The dinner-table cleared and the kitchen tidied—"I will not give her the least occasion to find fault with me," thought Miss Busybody, "I will be so painstaking and persevering and useful, that she shall be forced to be satisfied;" and I am not sure that there was not just the faintest suspicion of a wicked little smile at the corners of a certain pretty

mouth as these admirable resolves were arrived at. When one is poorly off for amusement it is not bad fun to try to improve people, to cultivate their higher leanings, and root out a few of the weeds disfiguring their neglected minds —always against their wills, though—that being, to use a modern expression, the "chalybeate." The kitchen tidied, I repeat, Tryphena put on her hood, her cloak, slipped her arm through the handles of her great basket, and despite the threatening appearance of the sky, which, vague and gray, yet tawny, all too truthfully betokened change, set off for Mrs. Bond's, a pleased look on her face, as though she had no objection to be the plaything of a keen north wind—a wind who bit instead of kissing, whose manners generally, indeed, betrayed a sad lack of polish—for a little while.

Anything was better than being sighed over.

Besides, the pudding disposed of and Clara inquired after, perhaps looked in upon—she had not been so well of late had not Clara, a little less equal to conversation, a little less alive to passing interests, worse by night and weaker by day—business of importance would

still remain to be transacted. Tryphena intended to call on Martha on her way home. "I am half afraid to go," thought the girl, as she battled on, her big cloak wrapped round her, and her head bent down. "I am sure she will be rude to me, and it is possible that she will order me off her premises altogether, set the Bantam cock or Chummy at me, or perhaps both; but it is my only chance, and so I must just make the best of it—beggars cannot be choosers." And thus thinking, battled on into the village, into the shop where she had been bidden to order certain alkalic and malodorous compounds set apart for household use. Now Mrs. Pope, the proprietress in her own right—her father built it—of this useful but unpleasant home of commerce, was a very nice little woman, red-cheeked, brown-eyed, brisk-tongued, a little woman with whom it was quite impossible to be distant, or indeed not to like heartily when you knew enough of her. Amadeus, her lawful lord, you could neither like nor dislike, know as much of him as you might, for he was deaf and dumb, and lived mostly in the backyard, where he had a workshop, seldom

appearing save in answer to the knuckle-taps on the counter of the very smallest children who had invariably come for "shrimps"—a local sweetmeat tinted red and white—which was strange, seeing, as I have said, that he had been without the faculty of hearing from his cradle, his mother—he was a Londoner—having poured a tea-kettleful of boiling water over him in a moment of forgetfulness. But to return. Mrs. Pope was a very nice little body, also—and this is more to the purpose—an enthusiast on the subject of young Miss Fowke.

"There is no one I like to serve so well!" she would aver, when taking a social cup with Miss Christina Fox, who was a valued friend of hers, they having had "bits o' fun" together in their youthful days, which "bits o' fun" would even now, when re-animated with "Don't you remembers?" and "But I says," cause tossings of the head, slappings of the knees, and swayings of the body, most eloquent—"there is nobody I like to serve so well. She's so gentle, and if you don't 'appen to 'ave just what she wants, she's always ready to make allowances. ''Twon't do,' says

she, 'but I dessay you'll 'ave some soon,' or, I 'must ask aunt first, but that seems very nice;' so different from Miss Wasberry, who used to turn up 'er nose and squint about and sniff as though we kep' a pigsty!"

Thus Tryphena being her own mistress for the present, to have a chat with Mrs. Pope—the soda and blue and mottled soap being ordered and paid for—seemed alike pleasant and expedient. The weather, the season, who was sick, and the new vicar passed under rapid review.

"I don't say that I 'zackly like 'im, you know, miss!" said Mrs. Pope, dropping her voice to a whisper, and glancing nervously at the open door—churchmen and church-women required groceries as well as Wesleyans and one must live. "P'r'aps it's 'is glasses, and I'm not much of a—— Good day, Martha, 'ow do you find yourself? I thought I 'eerd footsteps."

"I'm very well, thank you, 'm!" replied Martha, who had just made her appearance at the shop door, which stood open. "I want a pound o' dips, and 'alf a pound o' moist sugar." This walking up to the counter,

quite unconscious apparently of the presence of a third person.

"Very good," smiled Mrs. Pope, and forthwith busied herself in the supplying of these needs.

"Well," said the third person, rising to her feet, her cheeks as pink as though she had just been detected in the commission of some great crime, "I must be going."

"Lor! Miss Phenie," exclaimed our newcomer, turning round with as artistic a start and look of surprise as was ever elaborated by Rachel or Desclée, "is that you? I didn't see you."

"Indeed!" rejoined Tryphena, drily. "You must be in one of your absent fits!" and shut down the lid of her basket with expression. Was ever truth so wantonly impinged upon?

"P'r'aps I am," allowed Miss Tapp. "My 'ead do generally feel queer when there's snow in the air. Weer be you bound for?"

"Mrs. Bond's," replied the girl; "and then," blushing again and looking away at a cart which happened to pass at that moment—a cart with "Jacob Fowke, Shobdon Grange," printed in big black letters to rearward—"I was coming to see you."

Two round brown eyes grew rounder.

"There," exclaimed Mrs. Pope, reappearing from behind a wall of boxes, candles in hand, "I've got at 'em at last; 'tis a fresh lot, and them cases are so 'ard to open. And what else can I do for you?"

"Nothin', thank ye, mum!" said Martha, searching in her pocket for means of payment. "Well, I made certain I 'ad 'alf a crown. There never can be—no, 'ere it is," plucking forth the same. "Dear, what a turn that did give me, for only last week I lost a sixpence, and money's not so easy come by nowadays."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Pope, depositing the coin in her till, and counting forth the change—one shilling and sevenpence—(Tryphena's eyes fastened greedily upon the shilling)—"times be shockin' bad, and I 'ear that prices is still fallin', of stock and wheat and farm stuff that is. It do seem odd, though, don't it, that the cheapness o' things should make want?"

"I dunno," said Martha; "ef maisters can't get their money, lab'rers can't get theirs. That's weer folks do make a mistake, I think. The rich says to theirselves, 'so long as we

prosper all the rest may go empty;' and the poor says to theirselves, 'what do it matter to we whether 'tis a good market or a bad 'un so long as we gets our wages?' but it do matter. Life may be a see-saw, and the poor man may ride at one end while the rich rides at t'other; but 'tis the same plank they both sets astride of, and if one goes down to-day t'other 'll go down to-morrow; wheeras ef they were to jine in keepin' level, 'twould be better alike for their minds and constitootions—at least, that's the way I looks at it."

"And a good way too," laughed Mrs. Pope; "but there, you must learn all that for yourself; you can't fill folk's heads with wisdom like you stick flowers in a pot, and if you do 'tis pretty sure to come to nothin'."

"That's true," said Martha, "and for the same reason, 'tain't got no root. But I mustn't stay 'ere jabberin'. I've a pie to make. Lor! 'ow str'ight you do look, Miss Phenie!"

"Do I?" smiled Tryphena, "I was thinking that if prices fell again, father would be uneasy, for I heard him say only a little while ago that the country was in a fair way to be

ruined, and that those who didn't care to be beggared need be careful. However, I dare say something will be done. Which way are you going, Martha?"

"Well," said Martha, who for all her strong-mindedness was not quite proof against the insidious promptings of curiosity, "I don't much mind; you're going to Mrs. Bond's?"

"Yes," said Tryphena, "across the fields."

"Across the fields!" echoed Martha, with shocking duplicity, and then nodding to Mrs. Pope, proceeded to the door.

They faced the wind together.

"'Tis too cold for you to be out," observed our social economist, when a brief lull in the tyrant's pleasantries rendered remark audible, "and with nothin' on but that old cloak; why didn't you wear your woollen spenser?"

"I did not think it was so sharp," replied Tryphena. "Besides, as aunt says, neither sugar nor salt enter very largely into my composition. But you surprise me!"

"'Ow?" demanded Martha.

"By troubling yourself on my account."

"I trouble too much!" was the tart re-

sponse, " I trouble till I can neither sleep by night or eat by day, till I'm fair dazed, and no better than a simpleton. That's 'ow I trouble."

" I am surprised to hear that," rejoined the girl, coolly. " From your manner to me lately, I should have rather imagined that it did not matter to you in the least whether——"

" That's trash !" broke forth Martha. " Ef I've been short with you, you know as well as I do why I've been so."

" No, I don't," retorted Tryphena ; " you've chosen to take things into your head——"

" Take things into my head !" snapped Miss Tapp. " Would you have me make out I was stone blind ?"

" I would have you be just, and not——"

" Pooh !" scoffed the other. " Didn't you go to the man's 'ouse ? Don't I 'ear on all sides that——"

" You may hear what you please !" exclaimed Tryphena, exasperated by the woman's obstinacy. " Am I to blame because aunt chooses to go to Coatham ?—because people who should know better cannot mind their own business ? Perhaps you may not be aware "

—with crushing dignity—"that on Christmas Day I refused Mr. Latchet to his face, before both aunt and father."

To judge from the expression of Martha's countenance, this conjecture was not wholly fatuous.

"No!" said she, wonderingly.

"But yes," affirmed Tryphena, and walked on with heightened colour, her head a little thrown back, her mouth severe, like to the mouth of one who had her wrongs and knew it, and what was more was not going to give up those precious possessions in a hurry.

Truly one must assert one's self just a little, or these great, headstrong, violent creatures would by degrees rob one of all private rights whatsoever.

"Well," said Martha at length, as if conscience-stirred—I do not say stricken—"I'm sure that was very fine of you. Was that what made you go to bed so early?"

"I did not go to bed," was the frigid answer.

Martha relapsed into silence.

"Well," reiterated she, thoughtfully, after a while, "you couldn't have pleased me better

if you'd told me that I'd just come into a 'undred pounds. I'm sorry I spoke so sharp!"

"Ah," smiled Phenie, "I dare say. Trample a poor thing to death, and then cry over her. But I won't be grand. I'll forgive you just this once, because," dimpling bewitchingly, "I want you to do me a favour."

"What's that?"

Tryphena pouted. She had no patience with persons who could not understand their own mother tongue.

"I want you to lend me a shilling," said she, after a bit. "I have written to Robert, and I have no money to pay for——"

"You've written to—to Mr. Valoynes?" exclaimed Martha, joy lightening all over her face with quite electric vividness.

Tryphena nodded.

"Give it to me," cried Miss Tapp—"give me the letter! I'll run and post it now, this moment. If I 'adn't another farden in the world, if I 'ad to beg my bread to-morrow, it should go; but whatever 'ave you said? I'll be bound I've caught it!"

"You conceited mortal," laughed the girl, struggling with her gown pocket, "do you

suppose that I never have anything to think of except you?"

"Ah," smiled Martha, a little wistfully, "I'm a fool; 'owever," gazing at the somewhat tremulous superscription of the document Tryphena had just put into her hand, "even fools 'as their uses, if only to love them as——"

"Love nobody but themselves," jested the preached-at, "and have not one penny to rub upon another, and are generally in about as destitute and dismal and darkened a condi-tionas can well be imagined. Why," in a tone of remonstrance, "you goose! You don't really suppose that I'm not extremely grateful——"

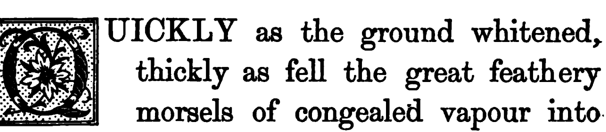
"Grateful!" echoed Martha, contemptuously —grateful, what for? Money—when I'd lay down my——But weer's the use o' talkin'? 'Taint to be expected that a young thing like you should 'ave feelin's for every one. Feelin's want room to grow in like other things;" and strode off at a pace not easily kept up with.

"Martha!" called Tryphena, as if in doubt. But she hailed the wind.

And down floated the first flake of snow.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF FATHOMLESS WORKINGS.



QUICKLY as the ground whitened, thickly as fell the great feathery morsels of congealed vapour into the hollowed hands of frost-pinched plants, the cracks and crevices of lichen-painted walls, on the bare bodies of stripped trees, the hooded head, the cloaked shoulders, the gaping basket of one little red-nosed girl, that little girl never so much as thought of turning back; for had she not a duty to perform?—had she not herself just accepted from the hands of Fate a benefit so signal as to awaken gratitude and a desire to deal similarly by others, to the utmost extent of her modest powers, in the bosom of the least appreciative of human creatures?

On bidding Mrs. Bond good-bye—to be candid, a somewhat exhaustive proceeding, she being low that afternoon, and inclined to break short off in the midst of remarks, and turn away her head, and even apply her apron to her eyes when sure that no one was looking; "it would be a bit dull in the cottage before long"—Tryphena found that the snow had changed to sleet, intermingled with small rain, also that it was rapidly growing dusk. So, with a final "You must try to keep up your spirits, though," and assurance of complete immunity from fear either of tramps or weather, off she hurried up the road—brown now and muddy enough to scare a squadron of town maidens—and across the bridge by the mill, as quick as she could go. Country lanes are scarcely the pleasantest of abiding places on a wet December evening.

A dismal world and a dismal journey—little feet weighed down with sodden, mire-daubed clogs, little hands nipped numb with cold, a little face scourged by fierce rain, a little body bent and crushed in the strong grasp of surely the savagest wind that ever wrought its wicked will on unoffending matter,

yet consolation ebbed not. Hope's torch burnt bright.

For *the* letter had been posted, Martha had been made aware that one was not quite the miracle of blackness she had elected to suppose —that she could, if she saw fit, be again a friend and sympathizer without injury to character or eternal interests. Yes! out of doors it was indeed very weird and dim and uncomfortable; but indoors, with one's work-basket before one, and one's thimble on one's finger, and father reading the paper, and the click, click of Aunt Rachel's knitting-needles in one's ear, mingled with the chirps of crickets and crackling of incandescent logs, and snores of an aged hound—ah, that would be pleasant enough, meditation being to match. Tryphena's lips parted in a pleased smile, and she quickened her pace—took, in fact, a little run —as she limned this mental picture.

The Grange reached, and the garden gate opened and shut, a matter of time and skill (to shorten her walk and escape from her elemental foes she had chosen the front way of entrance, past which the road she had taken directly lay), Tryphena scraped her clogs on the scraper

under the laurustinus bush, and shaking her cloak (it had again begun to snow), made her way up the gravel path to the front door.

The house, despite her natural satisfaction at the prospect of rest and a change of raiment, struck her as looking cold, cold and sad, like a house wherein lived none but grown-up people—people who worked and wrangled, and denied themselves, and "put by;" but never sang, or danced, or feasted, or made love, or, indeed, did anything not strictly their duty, from cradle to grave. Out of an open window, which nestled close to the thatched roof, fluttered a dimity curtain—a drenched, limp curtain, no better than a rag.

The girl's face grew anxious as she noted this forlorn symbol of human occupation. "If aunt has seen that," mused she, "she will read me a lecture a mile long," and taking hold of the boar's head, which served as a knocker, knocked timidly—for the first time in her life, she recollected on a sudden.

Scarcely, however, was this dread deed accomplished, when a sound smote upon her ears which swept her mind bare of thoughts, as ever the lilacs and laburnums were of

leaves—a sound issuing from the parlour; a sound of voices, voices male and female—of one voice——

Hot with fright, Tryphena faced round towards the gate. What mattered snow, what wind, that the night had all but fallen? Would not one brave hurricanes, waterspouts, tornadoes, Egyptian darkness, every known and unknown peril, including the most ferocious denizens of Noah's ark, sooner than——

Hark! a movement in the parlour, Aunt Rachel's satinet rustles in the hall. The girl fled.

"Stop!" cried Miss Fowke, as she swung back the great oaken door, "where are you going to?"

"Round the other way," was the shrill response.

"That you're not then!" exclaimed outraged authority, and gathering up her skirts, forthwith gave chase, with a reckless gallantry and defiance of results worthy the highest commendation. "What do you mean," went on this martial soul when retreat was effectually cut off, "by coming and

knocking at the door, and then shooting away like this? You go in this instant. Do you think I want to have the pleasure of nursing you the whole winter?"

"I did not know that any one was there," panted our fugitive, "until I heard you talking; and I cannot meet the minister."

"Cannot meet the minister!" echoed Miss Fowke, contemptuously. "You go in when I bid you."

"No!" exclaimed Tryphena, "I shan't. I will not meet the man;" and, with a sudden jerk, wrenched her cloak out of Aunt Rachel's hand, flung open the gate, and raced off down the road as fast as she could lay foot to ground.

What was to be done now? To follow her in slippers, bonnetless, without even so much as a shawl over one's shoulders, was quite out of the question; to pursue her vocally with threats, commands, or denunciations seemed equally futile; besides, think if somebody came by, and caught one bawling there like any fishwife. No, she had made good her escape, the vixen, and good she must be let to make it until such time at least as privacy,

restoring liberty of action, should admit of the freehanded and righteous administration of justice.

Miss Fowke tiptoed back to the house, her eyes bent upon the ground—her mouth exceeding grim. Disobedience was, in her opinion, the worst of domestic offences.

"You see?" said she, as, having dried her feet on the mat, and shaken out her petticoats, she re-entered the sitting-room—"you see?"

"Yes," replied the minister, gravely, turning himself about, his hands clasped behind him, he was standing at the window; "I do."

For some time there was silence. Then Acts sighed, sighed deep and lengthily, his heart being heavy.

"Eh?" exclaimed Aunt Rachel; "did you speak?"

"No," answered he, "I have no mind for speech," and looked about for his hat.

"It's there," she said, pointing to the sofa; "but you needn't be in such a hurry—I'll get a light in a minute."

"No, thank you," he returned, still in the same dull tone, "I prefer obscurity; it

matches the hue of my reflections," smiling faintly.

Again silence.

"Seriously though," pursued he, at length, "I am rather to be pitied, am I not?"

Aunt Rachel looked hard at the window.

"I do not know," replied she, "it seems to me that you have yourself to thank; but I say nothing. 'Tis not my place to say anything."

"There you're wrong," exclaimed Acts; "I know of no one whose advice I would accept sooner—no one on whose power of forming an accurate judgment I could so absolutely depend."

"Seems so!" was the laconic answer.

"You see," continued he, "what I feel is this. Tryphena, though very young——"

"No good'll come of it!" declared the counsellor—"you mark my words!"

"Why not?" he demanded.

"She don't care for you, and—— just look at the difference in your——"

"Yes, yes!" broke forth Mr. Latchet, with some slight petulance—"I was about to speak of that when you interrupted me; but age cannot be reckoned by years. The mental

sympathy existent between a wedded pair, one of whom is already conversant with the cares and sorrows of matured manhood, while the other still exults in youthful gaiety, may be as perfect as——"

"Ah," smiled Aunt Rachel, "but they must love each other!"

The minister's face darkened.

"There was," said he, bitterly, "a time when Tryphena did love me, when, if I had opened my arms and called to her, she would have come to me as readily as a child runs to an indulgent parent."

"Then why, for goodness' sake," exclaimed Aunt Rachel, her voice unpleasantly acute, "didn't you open your arms, and didn't you call to her?"

"Can you ask why?" was the reproachful answer. Yes, reproachful, on my honour.

The woman's eyes fell, her mouth quivered, she turned away her head as might one who battled strenuously with emotion neither weak nor of recent growth.

"Yes," continued Acts, in a tone of gentle melancholy—the tone wherein men, I notice, mostly make confession of past errors—"in

those days I had, indeed, very different hopes; but insensibly—we poor weak creatures are so easy of persuasion—sweet Phenie's fairness undermined staid conviction, and one fine morning I awoke to the fact that——"

"Sweet Phenie's fairness!" quoth Aunt Rachel, angrily, moved to utterance by force of inward fire, "what fairness?—fairness of a Dutch doll? Besides, please, don't talk to me in that way"—with stiffened neck—"I don't like it."

"I was only explaining the origin of a sentiment which seems to strike you as wholly inconceivable," replied Acts, calmly; "it is quite possible that I may be the victim of delusion."

"I think you are," agreed his hearer, "I think you are about as much deluded as any man I ever met with, except Bob Price, who would insist that he was Marshal Ney, and was going to be shot at sundown. He kept up that story for eight years, and then his father had him put in a lunatic asylum, where he died; but I heard afterwards that his last words were, 'Tell the emperor I forgive him.'"

Acts, troubled though he was, could not abstain from a laugh at this quaint reminiscence.

"Really," said he, glancing at the window, "well, I trust that the parallel may not prove quite exact; although there are times, I confess—just now, for instance—when I feel tempted to abandon hope altogether."

"I can't see for my part," observed Miss Fowke, dryly, "whatever right—yes, right—you have to hope at all—or, indeed, to have ever dreamt of hoping. You knew she was engaged."

"I knew that she had formed a disastrous attachment."

"But 'twas an attachment, and 'tis an attachment, and 'twill always be an attachment. You can't get any further than that."

"Mr. Fowke was not of that opinion."

Aunt Rachel smiled.

"Women's hearts ain't ploughed fields," said she, "to be cropped to a man's liking."

"Well," sighed Acts, holding out his hand, "I must consider. I do hope, however, that the tenor of our friendship may not——"

"Mr. Latchet," interposed Aunt Rachel,

gravely, "I'm only a plain body—plain in features and plain in dealing—and I tell you frankly that I've no patience with double-facedness. You may think of me what you please. I'll never go against you as our minister, but——"

"Why didn't you speak before, then?" exclaimed he, eagerly.

"I speak!" echoed she—her cheeks crimson, her eyes fairly ablaze—"I speak——" and, flinging away his hand as she might something unclean, turned on her heel and walked out of the room with the mien, not of an offended woman, but of an insulted empress.

"Humph!" ejaculated Acts; and mouth severe, hat tilted brow-ward, sought the hall, the door, the outer world, with what speed he might.

Once in the road, breast to breast with the pitiless wind, the driving snow, the vast and solemn night, a low bitter laugh escaped his scornful lips.

"Fool!" said he, and struck his gnarled thorn walking-stick savagely into the ground —"fool!" and then a strange sorrow swept athwart his face, "I drove her forth into all

this," he thought; "bade her be drenched, and chilled, and terrified. I!"

Arrived in the kitchen—the iron of one of her clogs had come off in the lane, she carried it in her hand; her petticoats flapped damply, even as that dimity curtain, against her heels, she surveyed them ruefully—Tryphena deposited her basket on the table with a lusty thump, as much as to say, "There, thank goodness I've got rid of you for some little time to come," and, shoeless, made her way noiselessly upstairs. Beauty, as usual, wished to keep her company, but she looked so gravely at the old dog, and "sh'd" so awfully, that the spirit of the poor beast quailed, and she retired to the hearth, her tail between her legs, her ears drooping, quite appalled. In no small perturbation and distress of mind did our rebel, I do assure you, await the "Tryphena!" which would summon her to take her place at the tea-table, and resume that rôle of underling and puppet in the elaboration of which she apparently was to spend the remaining term of her natural life. "Aunt will tell father," mused she, seated sideways on her bed, one small foot gathered up in one small

hand—so rosy a little foot; alack! those roses would be chilblains by to-morrow—"and father will begin at me, and I shall answer back, and then there will be ever so much more misery."

But the summons came and the seat at the tea-table was taken, and Aunt Rachel was glanced at, and father was listened to—the London papers were full of bad news, it seemed; if things went on like this the country would be swamped before the year was out; and yet never a word of blame, of tale-bearing.

Tryphena could not understand it. She drank her tea and ate her bread and gooseberry jam in blank wonderment. Neither throughout the whole evening was there any allusion made to her misconduct. Aunt Rachel certainly looked "straight." That, however, was no novelty.

"The snow will be green soon," decided some one; "it cannot help itself."

So lapsed the evening till half-past eight; then the ham stalked forth from the larder, the big brown loaf trundled out of the bread-pan, the cider flowed from the cider cask—to

eat, pray, and sleep became the paramount duties of humanity.

"And now," said Aunt Rachel, looking at Tryphena, as Mr. Fowke opened the back door and went forth to see that all was safe before he retired to rest, "you can go to bed. You don't feel stiff, I hope?"

"No," smiled Tryphena, whose spirits had risen owing to her unprecedented good luck; "I don't feel anything. Good-night."

"Good-night," replied Miss Fowke, and stooped to poke the fire. Then, as if smitten with a sudden impulse, she looked round and said, constrainedly:

"You must not be downhearted, child."

And the child paused and gazed, and then ran back, and at the imminent risk of setting a certain gay cap on fire, kissed the owner of that cap on the cheek with vast heartiness, and then dashed off full speed.

"Lord, how wild!" quoth the osculated, and I think that she had reason.

All sound of footsteps hushed. Aunt Rachel again stirred the fire. Beauty crept close to her for warmth, rose up and licked her hand, but she took no notice. Her eyes were

dimmed with tears; sad thoughts, surely, by the fashion of her mouth, chilled and obscured her mind.

"Yes," sighed she—"yes!" and sought—was it her handkerchief?

Another moment, and white lay amidst black and red; a glad flare, and vague atoms floated chimneywards.

"There!" said Miss Fowke, not quite unhappily.

"Why," exclaimed Jacob, as he lifted the worn latch, "I thought you were going to bed!"

"So I am," she answered, "but I had something to do first."

CHAPTER IX.

CAUTIOUSLY PEERING, ABSORBING, TRANSLATING.

SNOW here, snow there, snow everywhere.

"What a white world!" exclaimed Tryphena, as she appeared below on Wednesday morning; "fancy, if you could clean people's minds like that!"

"Well," retorted Miss Fowke, who chanced to be down first, having passed a wakeful night, "and what if you could? 'Twould only be outside cleaning, after all. Let a thaw set in, and 'twill be worse than 'twas before. But there, you're just like everybody else. You never can be at the trouble to go right down to the bottom of things."

"If the bottom's worse than the top," re-

plied the girl, callously, "I don't see the use of going down to it," and plied the bellows with vigour.

Of a truth, one was not so insufferably prosperous as to be reduced to the deliberate seeking out and concoction of bitterness by way of pastime.

Wednesday passed much in its usual manner. Martha came up for the tea-leaves—it was customary for the Tapp teapot to be replenished by the leavings of that commonly in use at the Grange; "it costs nothing," said Aunt Rachel, "and yet it helps; besides, one should consider human creatures before carpets." Martha came up for the tea-leaves, I repeat, and Tryphena went and put them in a jug for her, and brought them, and got such a smile for her pains as made her mind quite easy—nay, the very easiest of minds.

"Dear Martha!" thought the girl, sunnily, "I knew she could not be cross with me long. My dear Martha!"

"Could not," mind you. Oh! the atrocious vanity of this quite absurd young person.

New Year's Day was bitterly cold, though bright. The glass stood at fair, despite the

most determined rappings. Tryphena, however, put that down to constitutional debility. It had stood at fair ever since her sixth birthday, when the hook on which it depended had given way, and it had fallen with a gréat crash to the ground, thereby ensuring her a sound box on the ear, she standing by the while, and Aunt Rachel, who hurried out to see what was the matter—it hung in the hall—naturally concluding that she had been up to some of her tricks, "fingering and fiddling." Yes, what the glass said did not much signify. Still, it was bright, and the snow showed no inclination to melt, for all the sun glared so fiercely. Truly a seasonable January the first.

Service over, to regain one's own fireside as expeditiously as possible — the sun having started for his Antipodean dominions in the semblance of a red-hot disc, wishing, perhaps, in common with other great people, to travel incognito, more than half an hour ago—seemed alike judicious and desirable ; but no mention was made of Mr. Latchet, either with reference to the sermon, which Tryphena held secretly to have been very inferior to that he gave them on Christmas morning, or the prayers, or

the possibility of his following them unbidden, or, indeed, anything concerning him.

This by tacit agreement.

"What have ye done with the minister?" demanded Jacob, huskily, as they presented themselves in the parlour previous to going upstairs to take off their bonnets and cloaks, Aunt Rachel's fingers being, she declared, "all thumbs," by reason of the cold. "Hasn't he come back with you?"

"No," said she, pulling off her gloves, and holding out her hands to the fervent caresses of the clear, bright fire.

"And why not?" questioned Mr. Fowke, straightening himself up in the wooden-backed horsehair-seated arm-chair wherein he had been alternatly dozing and doing sums—sums compound rather than simple—ever since dinner. It was strange how little it took to amuse this worthy gentleman: solitude and mental arithmetic would charm him for hours together.

"How can I tell you?" was the unmoved answer; "most likely he'd got somewhere else to go to."

"Where else?" retorted Jacob, fiercely.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, "don't shout at me like that, if you please. Am I Mr. Latchet's keeper, to drag him hither and thither like a dog in a string? There are plenty of sick folks in the parish, aren't there?"

"All right," said Jacob, and shut his mouth manfully. He would not speak of Acts again that night.

Arrived in her own room, Tryphena came out of her pelisse, and untied the satin strings of her grand new bonnet, and subsequently rolled them up, and brushed its soft velvet crown, and laid it away in its appointed box, slowly, as if her thoughts were given to quite other matters, as if, indeed, she were considerably puzzled as to the phase her world might exhibit next. And, to be candid, such was her sorry case; for the powers arrayed against her—she, a poor weak creature, as easily vexed and made to cry, and put to shame, now, at the age of eighteen, as when a small brat of three—were terribly strong and merciless. And she had no auxiliaries to fall back upon, except Martha and perhaps John—not that he, with the best of intentions, honest soul, could render much service, being always

in the fields, and forced to make a living. Aunt Rachel? No; Aunt Rachel was purely neutral. She would not herself oppress one, at least not openly; but, on the other hand, she would not do battle with one's oppressors. Well, Robert must write soon — *must* by Thursday or Friday, at the very latest, and he might say something which—— Tryphena, however, found it a little difficult to round off this hypothesis, even in the strictest seclusion, and solely for her own satisfaction.

So she went down to tea, and ate and drank with her wonted steadiness, and subsequently helped herself to a hymn-book which had belonged to her mother—a little old hymn-book bound in worn red morocco, and conned over old favourites, and "got" two new ones by heart, which two she added that night to her prayers, kneeling white and small and childlike by the side of her strait bed.

For it was quite wrong to worry. God would take care of her, "mother" would watch over her, and sorrow purified. It might be that presently, when grace and years had matured her powers of judgment and sharpened her perceptive faculties, she would

be able to discern the true nature of all these troubles, and know them for the blessings in disguise they doubtless were. It was a pity, perhaps, that the disguise was so very perfect; still, she could not doubt but that they would emerge thence at last, a wife being required to show fortitude and breast calamity.

"For instance," mused my dear Phenie, "suppose there should be a revolution, as Robert thinks there will be, and he were to lose all his property, and we had to flee for our lives, like the poor French, or if he were to fall sick, much use I should be to him if I could only cry and shake. No, depend upon it, all that I now think so hard is in reality just what I want to fit me for the future;" and went to sleep quite happy because of her unhappiness. Oh, wondrous Woman!

It was, I think, on the morning of the following Thursday that Mr. Latchet, as he sat in his little study making notes for a discourse which he had been invited to deliver at a tea-meeting, which would take place on Friday evening in the Wesleyan school-room under the auspices of the leading inhabitants of Coatham—such of that august body at

least as belonged to that persuasion—to celebrate the fifth anniversary of its opening, and generally review the events of the preceding Christian year, received a call from Mr. Joliffe, the builder, with whom negotiations had been initiated with regard to the erection of the proposed chapel at Shobdon, agreeably to instructions issued by Mr. Fowke, on the evening of the Sunday before Christmas, when, as you may remember, they (he and Acts) left the Grange after tea together.

"You see, sir," said Mr. Joliffe, who was a stout, square, loud-voiced little man, with a red and piscine countenance, his eyes being vague, glassy, and protuberant, and his mouth, when in repose, open and circular—"you see, sir," said Mr. Joliffe, balancing his hat on two fingers between his knees, "bricks is bricks, and not mushrooms."

"Certainly," smiled Acts.

"Therefore," weightily, "they must be ordered beforehand. I can't work without stuff to work with."

"Of course not," agreed Mr. Latchet; "I will see Mr. Fowke about it this afternoon."

"You will?" said Mr. Joliffe, who prided

himself on his business abilities—his knack of bringing a man to book, mark you; "you've got my estimate?"

"Yes," answered Acts, "it is in my desk. I will take it with me, and let you know what is to be done to-morrow."

Mr. Joliffe rose to his feet, laboriously, by the aid of a thick walking-stick, being much troubled with rheumatic gout.

"I hope," observed the minister, in his bland way, rising likewise, "that Mrs. Joliffe is better?"

"No, sir, she's not," was the stolid answer, "and never will be, I don't believe."

"Dear me!" said Acts, with a sympathetic frown, "that is very sad. Do you find that her strength declines, then?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Joliffe, "I do; these last two days she's been forced to keep her bed entirely. "Ah!" heaving a sigh—you might be excused for apprehending bubbles—"it's a bad job. I'm sure I don't know what'll come of it."

Mr. Latchet maintained a feeling silence.

"And now," pursued the builder, in the tone of one engrossed in the contemplation of

his own misfortunes, "there's Ben. He's been and taken up with that Eliza Cowslip, old Cowslip's daughter, who went bankrupt at Michaelmas—not a penny to bless themselves with, and owing me I can't tell you how much. But," suddenly regaining consciousness, "I'm keeping you. You'll see Fowke?"

"Yes." answered Acts, "and let you know to-morrow."

"Very well," replied Mr. Joliffe, "the sooner the better;" and, with a curt good-morning, departed in quest of home, dinner, and last, but not least, that social tumbler, which, so whispered rumour, threatened to become a worse domestic evil than even the sickness of the "missus" or the amativeness of gilded youth. Ben Joliffe's hats, collars, ties, and other incidental appurtenances were the talk of Coatham, specially of Coatham errand-boys and Mrs. Baker's apprentices, over whom Miss Cowslip reigned in the proud capacity of "first hand."

Now, it is possible that a man of a more ambitious turn than Mr. Latchet, or with a stricter sense of his own claims to consideration, might have thought it somewhat presumptuous of

an illiterate old dealer in lathes and plaster to intrude upon privacy alike studious and invaluable, might have resented the supposition that he was merely the middle man in a business transaction, to be hustled hither and thither precisely as the transacting parties might see fit; but Acts being for all his cleverness something less than visionary—what Aunt Rachel would call "high-flying" —no despiser of the commonplace, took no offence at Mr. Joliffe's outspokenness, neither, in the superiority of his attainments, or the brilliance of his scholarship, determined to break his promise as soon as made.

No; dinner over, he put on his boots, his cloak, his hat, and started for Shobdon at a brisk pace, and with all the good-will in the world—good-will bred of a sense of obligation united with desire, than which I doubt whether there is a more delightful in the whole range of human emotions.

The day, though not so bright as its immediate predecessors, was still fairly fine, and the white and brown and green landscape, green with the ample leaves of "roots," acres of ragged and not too well smelling cabbages,

among which would occasionally be penned sundry tens and twenties of bleating sheep, afforded the eyes of the pedestrian a sober pleasure not quite without its value, reckoned in the scale of unartificial enjoyments.

Acts did not essay the fields to-day; for one thing they would be almost impassable, by reason of the snow, which still lay about bright and spotless, as if "waiting for more," said Mrs. Forbes; and indeed, if the glass went up but two degrees it seemed almost certain that another fall would take place, the sky being overspread with that peculiar pallor seldom barren of such result; for another, he had to call at Gregory's, tea and sugar having suddenly run short, which would oblige him to go into the town; and thirdly, he preferred the high road simply as a matter of choice, for if there was a spot on earth the existence of which he remembered with reluctance, that spot was situate beneath King's Tree.

Since Christmas an unexpected, and to some extent unreasonable, but nevertheless quite perceptible, change had taken place in the mental attitude of this strange man.

It is possible that being, even when thereto

tempted by the specious pleadings of desire, little given to clothe fact either in the many-tinted robe of imagination or the deforming garb of prejudice, he may have gradually stolen upon the discovery that even if Jacob did by dint of force and parental authority compel Tryphena to become his wife, her heart would never be his, that from his wedding-day he must live in a perpetual state of siege, ever fearing reprisal, ever on his guard lest the enemy—that enemy whose strongest ally was second in command within the fortress—should swoop down, swarm in over outworks and bastions, and violently sack and pillage and destroy his sole remaining refuge under the sun.

"So long as that man is alive," had mused Acts as he sat by the fire on Christmas night, sat on and on, long after Mrs. Forbes had crept upstairs, long after his usual bed-time, he had so much to think off, "I could never legitimately know an hour's peace, for when she was asleep she would be dreaming of him, and when she was awake her mind would be harbouring him. Is it worth while to burden one's self with such miseries for the sake of

any creature that ever was born? I do not believe that I could put up with it quietly, either; it would anger me at last, and then I might—I might——" But he did not care to follow up that possibility; for it hurt him to find that he could so much as question the bliss of being thus tormented. Something of this was floating in his mind, but quite vaguely, so that he did not exactly know why he spoke or what he meant, except that he wished to condone past offences—I am afraid that praise was ever a little too dear to Acts—during that conversation held with Aunt Rachel in the Grange parlour on Tuesday afternoon, Tryphena's unexpected assertion of independence having re-awakened these painful doubts and certainties, lulled for a while to quiescence by the hum of passing interests.

On Sunday morning, when thinking over his day's work as he dressed, he resolved that unless he noted marked indications of a change, he would not allow himself, either by personal inclination or persuasion, to be drawn into forcing his society on one for whom it possessed clearly so little value. No, he would shift front, stand upon his rights,

rights acquired as minister and spiritual guide, likewise the object of respectful solicitude and affection on the part of those at least as well qualified to judge of a man's merits as a young and unsophisticated woman, who had scarcely stirred beyond the boundaries of her native parish.

How Sunday justified this sage resolution you already know. No token of a desire for reconciliation could be descried on Tryphena's calm, pale face; not once did their eyes meet, often as he looked at her—not even during the sermon, which he had vowed within himself, as he shut his Bible, and clasped his hands behind him, and considered the structure of his initial sentence, should be of so rousing a nature, so rich in home truths, that she, timid soul, must perforce start and recognize their origin. Alas! wrecked vow. And to-day, as he walked briskly along betwixt the snow-garlanded hedges, almost as fair as in their summer glory, Mr. Latchet thought that, if occasion served during his talk with Jacob, he would—well, he would get rid of some of these mental thorns and nettles which had of late sprung up with such

noxious fertility, obscuring a man's intellect, even interfering with appetite and the proper performance of professional duties.

That he might be nursing disappointment; that Mr. Fowke might be away at some one of the markets, which he from time to time would honour with his presence, just as an encouragement to trade, and proof of the continued stability of things; or at Chadlington disposing of wool; or at Liss, superintending the breaking up of certain arable land which he had recently taken upon lease of Margetts the grazier, never struck our wayfarer as possible until he was in sight of the tower of Shobdon Church, and then but lightly—there was so little doing at that time of the year, specially during this particular week, people being too much taken up with their boys and girls just home from school, their grandchildren, their married sons and daughters, to have time to spare for, or thoughts to throw away on, business.

Still, when on passing Long Clearing, a hilly field now devoted to mangold wurzel, but in summer glad with the sweet breath of beans—Tryphena would stroll up there of a

July night, on purpose to regale her nose with that most adorable of odours—he caught sight of a man on a stout brown horse—a man not hard of recognition, a horse as readily known to be Brown Peter as though that homely cognomen were painted in big white letters upon his sleek plump side, and a telescope had been at hand to view him through—I will not say that the minister was sorry. He did not wish to call at the Grange, though prepared to do so sooner than let go his purpose, the manner of his last exit from that substantial dwelling-place not having been such as to render the notion of re-entry too seductive.

Quitting the high road (Long Clearing lay to the left of the sign-post, about a mile from the village), he pushed open the briar-garnished gate—briar-garnished by John in defiance of sheep-stealers, certain valuable ewes being penned among the roots—near to where Mr. Fowke was laying down the law with that majestic simplicity of diction and enviable positivity at once indicative of and natural to the born law-giver, and made his way along the narrow path which, skirting the hedge,

led by a somewhat circuitous detour to the upper part of the field.

"Hi!" shouted Jacob, espying the trespasser.

Acts waved his hat.

Tightening his hold on the bridle, Mr. Fowke rode slowly some little way downhill.

"I was just wishing," exclaimed he, as they came within earshot of each other, "that you'd look in to-day. I've been wanting to see you all the week."

"Indeed!" smiled the minister, and paused.

CHAPTER X.

A DARKER SHADOW IN THE SHADE.

" HAVE had, observed the minister, when a few moments had elapsed, "a visit from Joliffe. He called on me this morning to ask what was to be done about the bricks."

"Bricks!" echoed Jacob, knitting his brows —"what bricks?"

"The bricks for the chapel."

Mr. Fowke's face hardened.

"He's in a vast hurry," said he, at length; "I shan't begin to build before the spring."

"Like the birds," smiled Acts; "possibly, however, he may want to send in this quarter's orders all at once, so as to make sure of not running short."

"H'm!" growled Jacob, "I'll tell ye what

he does want—he wants my money to pay his son's debts with, and he may want. Damme, do you think I'm going to pay for work twice over—work, too, that's not even begun, and may never be begun for aught I know? You must take me for a soft un!"

Acts shook his head. He could, he thought, well afford to face that imputation.

"What's the estimate?" inquired Mr. Fowke, at length, tapping the toe of his right boot with his riding-whip.

Acts unbuttoned his cloak.

"I brought it over for you to see," said he, plunging his hand into his breast-pocket; "there," producing a bulky pocket-book and selecting thence a slip of blue paper, which he gave to Mr. Fowke.

"Humph!" grunted that gentleman, when he had acquainted himself with its contents, "and plenty, too. Well, I'll keep it—'twill do to refer to—but as for buying bricks now, the next time you see Joliffe, just you tell him, with my compliments, that when Mr. Ben's safe lodged in Dorchester gaol he may expect an order."

"Poor old Joliffe!" smiled the minister;

"it must be a sore trial to be openly disgraced and defied by one's only son."

"Why don't he kick the rascal out o' doors? Catch a son o' mine defying me, or a daughter either, for the matter of that. But the man's an ass. He's brought his troubles on himself, and let him bear them. Better men than him have had to do the same."

"Yes," agreed Acts; "the worst of it is that the weakest are, as a rule, the most troubled."

"All their own faults," was the prompt rejoinder, "what right have they got to be weak to start with?"

"Inherent," smiled Mr. Latchet.

Jacob shrugged his shoulders.

"Ha," said he; "well, I'll tell ye what I should do with such if I had my way. I should just smother 'em, for fools are a deal more mischievous than knaves, in my opinion, and for this reason: a knave does the harm he means to and then stops, whereas a fool's at it always. But what became of you on Sunday?"

The minister lifted his hat.

"I returned to Coatham immediately after service," he answered, at length.

"You did!" said Jacob; "and why?"

But Acts kept silence. To tell the truth, he did not care to say plainly, "I knew that I was not wanted."

Mr. Fowke's eyes grew critical.

That the man's vanity had been set on edge by something which had happened either on Sunday or during the preceding week was as apparent as though written in round-hand on his downcast countenance.

"Well," observed Jacob presently, rising in his stirrups, and resettling himself in the saddle, "'twas a pity you did not look in. 'Twon't do for you to be over bashful;" this with a grin.

Acts clasped his hands tightly over the knotted head of his thick walking-stick.

"I have been thinking," he said, and paused.

Jacob waited for him to continue.

"I have been considering," he went on, "whether, after all, it would not be wiser to——"

"You want to hark back?" broke forth Mr. Fowke, irefully.

"Hush!" said Acts, and looked round at John

and Peter Batt, who were making their way slowly towards the gate.

"Pooh!" scoffed the master—and bade the men bestir themselves in a tone which peremptorily forbade hesitation. When a labourer's notion of celerity failed to coincide with that held for the time being by this freeholder of British soil, it was his playful habit to quicken that labourer's perceptions by divers cuts with his riding-whip over the shoulders, legs, head—any part of the agricultural person, in fact, which might be conveniently placed for the reception of such monitions. And the poor slavish creatures showed no resentment; nay, would laugh among themselves when his back was turned, and hold odd discussions as to what did actually constitute the difference 'twixt one man and another. Once mischief all but arose from this engaging practice. Abe Bennett—brother to Will, Martha's sweetheart that used to be—having gotten a slash for crooked ploughing, let go the tiller, and turning fiercely, fists doubled, on the aggressor, dared him to do that again so long as they two lived—was indeed with great difficulty restrained by John, being a hot-tempered

fellow, and reckless as a maddened animal, from avenging the insult there and then, after a manner which must have proved equally disastrous for all parties. Two years afterwards, having scarce bread to eat, and being shut out from all chances of employment —you may be sure Jacob Fowke was not slow to make known his version of the case—Abe took ship for America, since which time he had not been heard of. "Murderous scoundrel!" said Shobdon Grange. "Poor lad," said Shobdon. But this little circumstance did not tend to increase the respect or decrease the awe entertained by the one for the other.

"Abe weer just stairved out," John would still assert over his Saturday-night half-pint; "and stairved out's what every one on us 'ud be if we was to do the saam."

So they suffered in silence, like the cowed beasts of burden that they were, each with his pack on his back, and on that pack seated the "missus" and the "fam'ly."

"And now," said Jacob, when the briar-garnished gate was dragged to, and he felt himself at liberty to talk as long and loudly

and freely as he pleased—" and now perhaps you'll go on with what you were saying."

Thus stimulated, Mr. Latchet seemed to collect his thoughts.

"You see," remarked he at length, "I cannot blind myself to the fact that Tryphena's attachment to Mr. Valoynes is as strong as ever."

"What of that?"

"This, that I do not care to plunge, eyes open, into a whirlpool of domestic misery."

Jacob's mouth tightened.

For a while there was silence. In the west, one long red cloud, shaped like to a pen, made grayer the ceaseless gray; on the white hills, in the sad woods, lay camped the vanguard of night; occasionally a low bleat would arise from the vague groups of prisoned sheep, huddled up close together for the sake of warmth; a hungered bird would chirp and flutter in the hedge; higher up, there where the snow lay thin, you might, if you could get close enough, spy a shabby lark or two hopping about on the frozen earth, and doing their best to earn an honest livelihood during the "off" season. It was very chill, very quiet, very deadening.

"And so," observed Mr. Fowke, at length, when he had, we will presume, reconnoitred his position, "you'd like me to go home and tell Tryphena that you've altered your mind?"

"Not like," murmured Acts, deprecatorily.

"What do words signify?" came the fierce retort; "thank God, I can get my living without being obliged to measure my speech like so much poison. All I care for is meaning."

"I, also," smiled the minister.

"Then speak out, will you?"

"I am willing that you should adopt the course you mention."

"Tell my girl that you've given up the thoughts of marrying her?"

"Yes."

"Good! Well, then, perhaps I'd better tell you that that's a message I'll never carry, neither will let be carried. You've put everything on marrying the girl, and the girl you shall marry. Mark me. The girl you *shall* marry!"

"But," exclaimed Acts, "you cannot suppose that——"

"I suppose nothing," was the dogged answer, "I know; and I know this, as my son-in-law your tongue's tied, for you're a deuced sight too long-headed to knock down the house that shelters you. As things stand, you're free to say and do just as you please. I can take my measure of a man as well as any lawyer in England."

"Or imagine you can," retorted Mr. Latchet, not without warmth; "whether I become your son-in-law or not, you may be very certain that I shall never again mix or meddle in your affairs. Indeed, nothing would delight me so much as to wipe their odious memory clean out of my mind altogether. I do assure you it is no pleasure to me to handle foulness!"

"That's all very fine," responded Mr. Fowke, coolly; "you came poking your nose into what did not concern you. You named your own price. Confound it, man, do you think I'm going to go all the days of my life in fear of you? You stick to your bargain. The girl shall call you master before Lady Day."

"What's the use of her calling me master if she calls Valoynes lord?" exclaimed Acts,

hotly. "I tell you, I won't be driven into a corner. Peace of mind is as dear to me as to you."

"You're afraid that she might play you false after you were married?"

The minister remained silent, but his face made confession.

"You needn't be," said Jacob, quietly; "there's never been a woman Fowke yet who brought that kind of shame on her family. One of 'em was burnt for witchcraft, and another at Smithfield; but be a——" (I would rather not write the word here used.) "No; that strain's not in our breed so far. I suppose," pursued he, after a pause, finding that Acts made no remark, "that you don't happen to have taken up with anybody else by chance?"

A smile.

"Because I'd like to be safe on that point *first*. You gay young parsons are ticklish subjects."

"You may make your mind quite easy," was the placid answer.

Jacob paused.

"There was a time," said he, presently,

eyeing his whip, and assuming an air of nonchalance which, to tell the truth, seemed somewhat of a misfit, "when I used to fancy that you and Rachel were a bit sweet on each other."

Mr. Latchet looked up in vague astonishment.

"Ah!" smiled Jacob, "another of my blunders. It doesn't matter. All I meant was that if you had any idea of making up to her again you were—" ("I never had such an idea," icily)—"you were reckoning without your host, for treachery's just the one thing Fowkes never can get over. Open enmity they'll stand up to, and dislike they'll find excuses for, but treachery—treachery they hate; recollect that!"

"Why?" questioned Acts, as bold as brass—"why should I recollect anything of the sort? What is it to me?"

Jacob nodded.

"Don't you let it be," said he, with strange gravity, "that's all. You'd better come up to the house now; I've pretty well made an end of what I've got to do, I think," twisting round, one hand on Brown Peter's back, his

eyes roaming meditatively about the upper portion of the field.

"No, thank you," replied Acts, stiffly, "I must go home," and turned away as he spoke.

"That's a pity," said Mr. Fowke; "'twas a good thing those ewes weren't sheared last month. I told Tapp he'd better let 'em be, for we should have a winter yet. Don't you say anything to Joliffe if you see him. I'll settle all that;" this proceeding to the gate.

"Very well," responded the minister, but his tone was scarcely that of thanksgiving, the culture of emotion being, I regret to say, in advance of his powers just at present.

Arrived in the road, Jacob made a last assault on resolution.

"Come," exclaimed he, with fine hospitable openness, "put your best foot foremost; 'tis but a step."

Acts smiled.

"No, thank you," he reiterated; "I don't want to drive Tryphena out of doors again."

"Again?" echoed Jacob.

"Yes, again. On Tuesday, when she caught sight of me through the window (she had just

come in from the village), she turned and fled as though I were the arch fiend himself," with a bitter little laugh. "Didn't Miss Fowke tell you?"

"No!" answered Jacob; "she said that you had called, but nothing more."

"You see," observed Acts, dryly, "my conclusions are not quite unjustifiable. I have some slight ground for apprehension."

Jacob seemed to meditate.

"H'm!" ejaculated he at length, "well, I must look to it. You leave it to me. Good-night."

"Good-night," rejoined Acts, and pressing his hat tight down upon his head—the wind had got up while they had been talking—started Coathamwards forthwith.

"So much the worse for her!" muttered Mr. Fowke beneath his set teeth, as he trotted briskly towards the Grange, and drove his spurs into Brown Peter's sides in a way which intimated the nature of his thoughts with sufficient clearness.

So much the worse for her!

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE WHEEL.

WHEN Mr. Fowke, whip in hand, quitted the stable-yard, having relegated Peter to his stall, likewise supplied him with food and drink—if this grim, sardonic old man loved any living creature, that creature was assuredly his horse—the short day of eight hours had almost faded into night, and the evening star hung lampwise in the east.

Through the kitchen window beamed the bright face of flame, charging the outside gloom with homely pleasantness, rousing—as firelight so seen does ever rouse, I think—memories, warm, cheerful, silent as itself.

Mr. Fowke, however, as became one of his high standing, was quite above the weakness

of dwelling fondly on the past. All he thought of when he noted that ruddy blaze was that they must be burning wood enough to burn an ox; also that he'd put a stop to that before he was many minutes older.

But no sooner had he flung open the back door than a sight met his eyes which for the moment deprived him of power of utterance.

By the fire stood Tryphena, in her two hands an open letter—yes, a letter—a great, thickly-written letter, the which she was reading with all her might.

He soon recovered himself, however.

"So," exclaimed he, striding up to her, as she started and cried out, and vainly strove to find her pocket, "I've caught you at last!" and gripping hold of her right arm, wrenched her prize out of her grasp.

But she would not let it go without a struggle, she tried to get it back from him.

"Out of the way!" he shouted, thrusting his elbow savagely against her bosom, which made her gasp a little and turn pale, and flung it into the fire—right into the heart of that great fire, which caught at it greedily, and ate it up with immense relish to the uttermost

morsel. Tryphena shrieked as though it were a living thing.

"Oh, for shame!" exclaimed she—"oh, cruel—cruel!" and panted and wrung her hands, and finally fell a sobbing so that you might have heard her at the top of the house. She did not care what she did, she would tear her hair, she would fling herself down on the floor and beat her brains out on the stones. Her dear letter—her dear letter. Only hers since morning, and burnt—burnt!

"Stop that noise!" commanded Jacob.

But she sobbed on.

"Stop it, I tell you!" reiterated he, stamping his foot.

"I can't!" she gasped—her face buried in her hands, her shoulders heaving convulsively; "I had but one thing to care for in the world, and—you've robbed me of it, and—and my—hea—heart is broken!" and a fresh outburst.

"All the better!" was the unmoved answer, "set your will the example."

Tryphena turned away, and walked towards the door. She did not know that she did so; she knew nothing save that her head throbbed

as if it would burst, and that she could not draw a long breath to save her life.

"You turn round!" exclaimed Mr. Fowke, wrought to fury by this, as he deemed it, fresh act of insubordination, "and listen to what I've got to say to you. None of your high-tragedy airs for me. You obey, or I'll make you, and that shortly, and in a way you won't fancy."

The girl gazed at him out of her poor wet eyes, as might an ewe lamb gaze at a wild beast who was about to spring on her.

"Ay," said he, "you may stare. I've heard of your behaviour on Tuesday."

"I only got out of the way," she pleaded, tremulously.

"And what business had you to get out of his way? Isn't he your accepted husband? Don't I mean that you should marry him? Marry him soon, too. I'll have no shilly-shallying. Buy the ring, and get to church. The quicker the better."

"But I will never marry him!" cried she, desperately; "I will drown, burn, starve, but I will never marry that man. I have said so, and I will hold to it. If you are fierce and

obstinate, I am your daughter—I can be fierce and——"

Slash fell the knotted thong of a man's riding-whip athwart her face, staining one cheek blood red, cutting her lips as 'twere a knife.

The garden gate banged.

Martha stood on the doorstep.

Jacob eyed her in sullen silence; she eyed them both.

"Lor' a mercy me!" exclaimed she, at length, gazing ruefully at Tryphena's ensanguined countenance, "whatever is the matter? Why, Miss Phenie," in a tone of mingled sorrow and vexation, "what can you 'ave been a doin' for the maister to 'ave to punish you like that?"

But Tryphena only shook her head.

"She's a rebellious hussy," said Jacob, sternly, "and deserves not one cut, but fifty. Come, march off!" twisting her round towards the door.

"Weer?" demanded Martha, with some asperity.

"Where!" echoed Mr. Fowke—"where I please."

At that moment Aunt Rachel entered from the hall. She had gone upstairs to change her dress at the very moment that Jacob had turned the key in the stable-door—a circumstance insignificant in itself, yet of relative value, Tryphena having been led thereby into that indiscretion which had already been productive of results not quite unnoteworthy, and the ultimate consequences of which, who dare predetermine?

"Oh, Miss Rachel," exclaimed Martha, turning to the new-comer, who paused, brows lifted, eyes dilate, "do you beg the maister not to be so onmerciful. Young folks is so apt to——"

"Get along," growled Jacob, driving the girl before him as he might one of his cherished swine, "I've had enough of your impudence for some time past," and pushed her sobbing through the doorway, Miss Fowke standing aside in grim passivity.

Martha's face crimsoned. She made a step forward, but habit proved stronger even than affection. She dared not confront her landlord.

"Oh dear—oh dear!" exclaimed she, dis-

tressfully, "what is to be done? Don't you think that you could—that you ought to interfere, 'm?"

Aunt Rachel walked to the fireplace and took a spill from a china jar on the mantelshelf.

"It is seldom wise to interfere between parents and children," said she, frigidly, straightening the wick of a half-consumed candle. Martha's mouth grew scornful; she quite hated the woman for her indifference.

"Wise!" echoed she, aggrievedly; "you wouldn't catch me stoppin' to think what was wise if I knew a poor thing's life to be in danger."

"Tryphena's life is not in danger that I am aware of," was the gelid answer.

"'Er mouth's all cut open at all events," retorted Miss Tapp, tartly, "and 'er pretty face swelled and wealed fit to make your 'eart ache only to look at it. And what's she done, I should like to know?—nothin', I'll bet, but be true to 'im she loves."

"It seems to me," said Miss Fowke, still in the same chill tone, "that you had better go home."

Martha, with a flounce, turned to the door. "It's the first time," remarked she, "that I've been told that," and walked a little way, head very high in air; then all of a sudden, in the most startling manner imaginable—really there was no end to the pranks and freaks of this quite unaccountable young woman—she faced round, her eyes full of tears, her hands clasped, her entire appearance that of one overwhelmed with grief, and sobbed out,

"Oh, but, Miss Rachel, do, for pity's sake, see that no 'arm comes to that poor child!"

And Aunt Rachel turned away, and snuffed the candle, and smiled curiously.

Nevertheless, scarcely was Martha—sickened, perplexed, terrified Martha—out of the house, than she caught up that candle and sped off upstairs, looking as anxious as she well could. But she would not be taught her duty—no, not by any one.

CHAPTER XII.

MIXED WITH SAD WONDER.

IN dire distress of mind, nay, crying bitterly, did Martha make her way home. To see Miss Phenie ill-treated, or what she thought ill-treated, hurt her worse than could have the severest of injuries inflicted on her own person. "I'd rather that 'e 'ad knocked my 'ead off," mused she, stumbling over a big stone, "than laid a finger upon 'er." Moreover, was it not downright brutal of any man to strike a woman—specially a father, and with a riding-whip, and over the face? I tell you this very desperate and outraged person could have cheerfully slain Mr. Fowke had he chanced to cross her path at that moment—slain him and

executed a *pas de joie* upon and about his corpse to celebrate her prowess.

She was so fiery a lover.

But be grief never so heartfelt, it will assuredly, being human, somewhere sustain a check. Again within the narrow limits of her home circle, or more strictly speaking her own little kitchen, Martha took off her bonnet and shawl, hung them on their particular peg, rolled up her sleeves, tied on her apron, and set about the preparation of supper—which would to-night be a more sumptuous repast than usual, consisting of a bit of fat boiled pork and some leeks, Tom having attained his majority at three o'clock that afternoon—as briskly as you could wish, for it went against her sense of fitness that Miss Phenie should be held liable to misfortune. She was so different to other girls, so much dearer, sweeter, more beautiful, that for her to be spoken of as in disgrace or trouble seemed really quite improper, almost as though you were to make reflections on her character, or find fault with her features.

"I'm not goin' to 'ave 'er name bandied about by every nunch in the place," meditated

Martha, grimly, drawing John's chair to the table; "I can keep my own counsel along o' any one, though I may be shown the door and treated like dirt. Fayther"—this aloud, stepping out into the porch, and turning towards the little washhouse whence proceeded a faint yellowish light, and noise as of wood chopping —"supper's ready."

"So be I!" called John, and throwing down his billhook, appeared therewith.

"What did Miss Rachel say?" inquired he, when the "relish" was dispensed, and Tom, in a clean smock, and the best of tempers, had signified his intention of "showin' 'em 'e were twenty-one in one way at any rate"—"do she want I to-morrer?"

Martha blew hard at a potato.

"She weer too busy to say," answered she, at length; "but you can step up in the mornin'."

"All right!" replied John.

You need not be a Machiavelli to circumvent J. Tapp.

Between the public and private conduct of we poor mortals, however, there seldom exists any very outrageous degree of same-

ness, luckily, I think, for those whose society we affect.

To see Martha sitting there, her elbows on the table, her chin supported on her clasped hands, her squirrel-like eyes—a little "cut by the wind," she averred, when questioned by Tom as to the cause of their occasional wateriness—turned now on "fayther" as he told how "he served old Drake's ram"—a spirited and entertaining history, which I much regret cannot here meet with the attention it deserves—followed up by how "mother" got away from Sweet William, the brindled bull; now on Tom, as he, with the fine hopefulness of youth, which it seems to me is about as beautiful a thing as you can well find out of a glass case, talked grandly of all he meant to do when—when—when—O, slyest of adverbs!—to see Martha, I say, then, thus serenely basking in the sunshine of the hearth, you would swear she was the happiest of living women. To see her an hour later, could you persuade yourself to violate the privacy of her little bed-chamber, you might be led to entertain a somewhat different opinion. Not that she stayed up, or wept aloud, or paced the floor,

or in any dramatic or grand or original manner drew attention to the fact that she was in the depths of woe. There were others in the house beside herself—others of high station in her universe, to whom sleep was more precious than fine gold. No; she went to bed quietly enough, and even slept after a fashion, and the clock had struck two; but her dreams——

Let me tell you one, just as a sample of the images elbowing each other through her vexed mind. Well, then, she dreamt that having strayed into a very dark place, how or where she knew not, she walked on and on, through never-ending passages, till she came to a flight of stairs, narrow, and dark also, and leading downwards. And as she stood wondering what she should do next, whether it would not be better to turn back, some one called "Martha." Whereat, plucking up her courage, likewise her skirts, for ugly creatures crawled and flitted here and there, she plunged boldly into the gloom—to fall, and fall, and fall head-foremost down into a sort of cell, lit by a slit in the wall. And in this cell, she not being any the worse for her

sudden flight, found near the window a heap of women's clothes, which, on nearer inspection, she saw hung upon a skeleton—terrible fleshless hands protruding through the gown sleeves—one terrible fleshless foot sticking out from beneath the petticoats. And moving the shocking object with her foot, there came to light a head, not yet a skull, and on this head grew soft dark hair, and from the blackened lips ran a small stream of blood. And as Martha gazed, the eyes opened, and they were blue—they were the eyes of Miss Tryphena. Whereupon, with a great cry, she woke, sitting bolt upright, and shaking like one smitten with the palsy.

"Good Lord!" said she, wiping her damp face, and got up and dressed forthwith, though it was but half-past four, and you could not see your hand in front of you. Another of those subterranean journeys, and she might pass the remainder of her existence in no less palatial an abode than the county lunatic asylum.

By ten o'clock on Friday, having made an end of her house work, and wrought her perceptive faculties to a high state of sensibility

by assiduously running her elbows against the corners of open drawers, driving her knees against the sharp edges of chairs, upsetting kettles into the fire, and, lastly, knocking down the china shepherd who, with his dog by his side, had unmolested kept guard on the third shelf of the dresser for more than two decades—by ten o'clock on Friday, I say, our poor Patty was as cross as any two sticks in the United Kingdom, and ready to tear the eyes out of the least offensive person she could encounter. This is always the way with your warm-hearted people when their small worlds wag askew. Still, though I being—or how else should I dare to handle the pen of the historian?—utterly above the comprehension of human frailty, can see nothing in the present conduct of this deplorable young woman but food for censure alike severe and necessitous, seriously between ourselves there does really seem some slight cause why she should betray irritation—why she should even smash the china shepherd's nose, no fitter way of saying "I am a miserable creature" just then presenting itself. For if Miss Phenie was in trouble last night it is pretty certain that she

is in trouble this morning, and that reflection alone is sufficiently embittering; besides, where is she? The Grange is a big house, containing cellars and attics almost unknown, save by tradition, even to those who inhabit it.

"'E may 'ave driven 'er into the Blue Lady's Chamber," meditated Martha, "out of which, if you come at all, you come ravin' mad; or 'e may 'ave shut 'er up in the black 'ole at the bottom of the cellar stairs, weer they do say Cracked Tom weer put after 'e stole the silver salt-cellar. Theer's never no tellin' what a man'll do 'oo's in one of them black rages. Dear, 'tis quite terrible. I must get at the truth some'ow or I shall lose my senses, wakin' as well as sleepin'"—she had not forgotten that vision of the night, you see—and therewith whipped round from the window out of which she had been gazing, arms akimbo, just as she gazed at Chummy and Beauty frolicking among the cabbages exactly one month ago, and plucked down her bonnet and shawl, for—she must get at the truth somehow.

It was raining when she set out for the Grange, and as she made her way along

the miry road, the rain changed to sleet, and the sleet to snow. But what cared she for that? Each flake might have been a bullet and she would have plodded on unscared. There was no sacrifice too tremendous, no danger too appalling, to be faced on behalf of Miss Tryphena. This unhappy person was, I think, rather crazed on the count of Miss Tryphena. Neither was it until she found herself in view of her destination—a somewhat bleak and chill and prison-like destination seen through shifting white, under a sky of ink—that she troubled herself to consider what plea she should advance in extenuation of this her second appearance in the space of twenty-four hours, after the very broad, not to say positive, intimation that her absence was held preferable to her presence, delivered by Aunt Rachel on the preceding evening.

The errand she had then been bound on, though ultimately left unaccomplished, owing to certain unforeseen events, was in itself genuine enough. John having desired her to step up and ask Miss Fowke if she wanted him to look to the garden on the morrow.

This inquiry, however, had doubtless now been made, and a substitute was not easily discoverable.

"Well," thought Martha, at length, "I shall just tell the truth. They know, or they ought to, what friends we've always been, and surely, seein' 'ow things stand, 'tis no great sin to feel a bit anxious."

So scroop went the garden-gate, and away she clattered in her pattens up the rough path, as unconcerned, to all outward seeming, as though she were overseer-general of households and comptroller of matters domestic throughout the length and breadth of Great Britain, by right of letters patent signed G. R.

Her temerity, however, was not destined to be put to any very severe test, for scarcely had she reached the back door when it was opened by Miss Fowke, the skirt of her brown gown thrown over her head, in her hand a wooden bowl full of boiled rice. She was going to feed the fowls.

For a moment or two they stood and eyed each other.

"Well," said Aunt Rachel, at length, "and what have you come about?" But her tone

was not encouraging, neither the form of her countenance—rather sour, in fact, and indicative of an inclination to bid persons go about their businesses.

"'Ow is Miss Phenie?" inquired Martha, following unconsciously the example of that canny Scot who, when puzzled how to reply to some too searching question, would meet the difficulty by "asking anither."

Aunt Rachel looked quite surprised.

"Tryphena!" she echoed—"how is Tryphena? Why, just as usual, of course!"

"Then p'r'aps I can speak to 'er?"

"No, that you can't!"

"Then," repeated Martha, doggedly—she was fond of saying "then" when in a warlike mood—"I don't believe she is as usual. As usual indeed!" not quite without contempt.

"What do you mean?" demanded Miss Fowke.

Martha frowned sullenly at a gnarled old pear tree, frowned as though that distorted victim of east winds were her deadliest enemy, and she would wither it root and branch.

"What do you mean?" reiterated Aunt Rachel.

"Let me see 'er."

Miss Fowke compressed her lips.

"You'd best go home!" observed she, frigidly; "Tryphena has something else to do than waste her time chattering to you;" and sped towards the gate.

"Ay," sneered Martha, "I'll warrant that."

"Martha Tapp," said Aunt Rachel, stopping short and turning on that untoward person eyes wherein dwelt something less than enmity, "take my advice. Don't come here again until you're sent for."

"Indeed!" scoffed the counselled, "and why? What reason is there that I should keep away now, any——"

"There is no reason, only," with emphasis, "you are not wanted."

"No!" exclaimed Martha, her face fervent with bitter exultation—"no! nor anybody else who won't up'old black cruelty. But I *will* come. I'll come, and come, and come; don't you think to dishearten me."

"Dishearten you!" echoed Aunt Rachel, "why you must be gone crazy!" and tried to laugh, but unsuccessfully.

"Ah," said Martha, "never mind, I'll know

the rights of it some day. Poor thing"—the tears starting to her eyes—"poor lamb, driven——"

"You fool!" exclaimed Miss Fowke, taxed beyond her strength, "what are you making all this set-out about? Don't I tell you that the girl's——"

"Let me see 'er, then," cried Martha, throwing back her head and striking an attitude of defiance quite superb, if viewed at a proper distance.

"No," returned Aunt Rachel, "not if you were to ask it on your knees!" and marched off to the poultry-yard, banging the little green gate behind her as though she would level it to the earth.

Martha smiled.

She knew what that meant, she fancied.

Saturday passed and Sunday came, and still no one saw or heard anything of Tryphena—no one, that is, who worked on the farm or had any doings with Miss Fowke. Mrs. Bond called at the Grange on Saturday morning to ask if Miss Phenie would mind giving Clary a call during the afternoon as she did seem "so very low," and Aunt Rachel

opened the door; but all the answer she would vouchsafe was that "She'd tell Tryphena." The widow was not satisfied, and informed Martha, whom she met subsequently, that she would much rather have seen Miss Phenie herself. That was the answer, however, and none other could be got, neither was any further notice taken of the application.

"It do seem strange, don't it, mother?" said Clara, as the daylight faded and with it hope. Ever since noon she has been listening, ears astrain, for the sound of footsteps in the garden. "'Tis so unlike 'er to set trouble against kindness, and she knows very well 'ow I do——" but the words died away in a whimper.

The silver cord waxed taut.

"Doan't ee fret," soothed Mrs. Bond, patting the girl's thin shoulder—"'twill only bring on the cough. Maybe Miss Fowke forgot."

But she did not think that at all likely. They were as puzzled the one as the other.

"Did ye 'appen to see Miss Phenie?" questioned Martha, when John had sat him down

to his supper on Saturday night, after a long day among the Grange cabbage beds and fruit trees.

"Noa," replied he; "I seed ne'er a one but Miss Rachel, and the maister, and ould Trimmer o' Spotworthy—'e do get more cripply, I think, each day 'e lives! Give I a drop more gravy."

"And did they neither on 'em say nowt?" demanded the inquisitor, advancing, stewpan in hand.

"'Oo?" inquired John, gazing up at her in dull bewilderment.

"Why, them sour krouts at the Grange."

"What about?" still stolidly.

"Lor'!" exclaimed Martha, "one 'ud think you was a Frenchman—about Miss Phenie, to be sure."

"Noa," replied John, assuming his knife and fork and shaking his head; "I can't rec'lleck as 'er name weer mentioned."

"Humph!" grunted Martha, and set to clearing the hearth as though she had but five minutes to live. Neither did her energy abate subsequent to the accomplishment of that important domestic office. She ran

hither and thither, and straightened the chairs and flicked the dust from off the jugs and vegetable dishes, and ordered John to "look sharp and get done with his supper," and finally whisked away that poor man's plate and mug before he had half finished with either, despite his touching entreaties that he might at least be allowed to drink up his cider, in a manner which would, I am sure, have shaken your belief in the humane instincts, not of one young woman only, but humanity in general, had you chanced to stand where stood the chronicler.

"I think," observed John, as a certain cupboard-door flew open, and this pitiless oppressor of the defenceless, going down upon her knees, declared her intention of "turnin' that inside out afore she slep', it being' a disgrace to any decent family, and fit to breed a fever," "that I'd better go to bed," and with a great yawn rose up out of his chair.

He and Patty had never had words but once since she was a girl, and then that cupboard had been at the bottom of it—that and a cracked teacup.

And on Sunday it was just as bad.

No sooner was the breakfast on the table than it must be snatched off again; to sit still for the space of one minute was a crime of so deep a dye that total annihilation seemed too slight a punishment; to yawn was an act of heroism; and to venture even on the expression of individual opinion not strictly feminine required no small degree of fortitude.

"What's the puddin' to be?" inquired Tom, who, being young and a man, would generally contrive to keep his head above the hottest of hot water.

"Puddin'!" retorted Martha—"there'll be no puddin', of my makin', at least. I want to get done quick. I be goin' to meetin'."

Tom whistled.

"Fayther," called he to John, who was smoking a pipe under the porch, "'ear till I. Patty be goin' to meetin'."

"Lor!" smiled John.

"Well," exclaimed Martha, "and what o' that? D'ye think I've no more soul nor that carrot!" seizing on a well-developed specimen, and holding it up in apt illustration.

But Tom had not attained his majority for

nothing. He only laughed and winked, and strolled out into the garden.

"'E's got a chest o' drawers," observed he, presently, putting his head in at the door, "and 'ood enough for a table, and 'is grandmother's promised 'im a clock."

"Pooh!" said Martha, and cut a turnip in half as if it were the chain of this gay youth's reasoning.

Nevertheless, when he had, still laughing, disappeared, a smile played about her lips. They were good friends, these two. There was not such another lad in Shobdon, or, indeed, the whole world, for the matter of that, as "our Tom," she would confidently affirm, though he "weer a bit of a tease, and apt to turn rusty when aggravated." And I will not take upon myself to pronounce that statement wholly valueless.

Well, about five minutes to three, attired in a dark blue gown, cut short in the skirt so as to show a pair of stoutly-shod feet and an inch or two of gray stocking, a thick purple shawl with a green border, and a brown satin bonnet of the shape in vogue when the Princess Charlotte was a bride—armed, moreover, with a stalwart

umbrella, and Bible swathed in a fair white handkerchief — a ruddy-cheeked, resolute-looking young woman might be seen to enter no less select a building than the Grange barn, also distributing certain grave nods of recognition amongst those persons already assembled, to seat herself upon one of the back benches, lean forward, and cover her face with her hand for a brief space, as if engaged in prayer, and then to straighten herself up, look about her, and generally assume an air of placid interest alike natural and appropriate.

As time elapsed, however, anxiety rather than curiosity became the dominant expression of this young woman's countenance. She watched the door, too, with quite canine intensity, and when the church bells "went down," as ran the local phrase, and Mr. Latchet made his appearance, something not unlike a frown settled on her brow, just as though—only that, of course, was quite impossible—she had been looking for some one who should have come, and had not.

Service over—very little benefit could our victim of suspense have derived from the ministerial labours, plunging into her Bible

with the first word of the opening petition, and continuing to read steadily therein, or seem to read, up to the close of the proceedings, ceasing only when compelled in obedience to the universal voice to stand up and join in or listen to the singing of the hymns, of which there were three—service over, the faithful sought the door with their accustomed alacrity.

Scarcely, however, had the foremost dwellers on " this side Jordan " made good their exit, than something, or somebody, stopped the way.

"What is it?" inquired Martha of Mrs. Kipps; and "What is it?" inquired Mrs. Kipps of Mrs. Pope; and "What is it?" inquired they all. A pause, a little pushing and impatience, and the mystery cleared up. In the midst of a small ring of eager faces stood Dicky Ludlow, sobbing piteously, his face besmeared with tears, one arm raised to his eyes.

"Why, Dicky," exclaimed Martha, laying her hand on the boy's shoulder, "what be the matter?"

"She's dead," he spluttered; "she died not 'alf an hour ago, just as I'd took she a egg. My duck laid it this morning. And

I weer to run and fet—hoo, hoo—fetch the minister."

"It's Clary Bond," said Mrs. Kipps, who was one of those emphatic beings to whom doubt is hateful.

"Ah," observed Mrs. Pope, "and a blessed release."

Whereat Mrs. Kipps winked both eyes and shook her head meaningly. She was a lady of judgment was Mrs. Kipps.

Martha stood silent.

"She weer so good," sobbed Dicky, "and I did love she so. I'll never love any one else. Oh, oh!"

"Nothing amiss, I hope," here observed the grave voice of Mr. Latchet. So they told him, somebody did. Mrs. Kipps, Mrs. Pope—not Dicky. No, Dicky was far too deep in his own grief to have words for any one; and then the crowd parted, and he, Acts, walked out thereof, away up the road—he was going straight to Mrs. Bond's—and Martha watched him—stonily. She felt quite dazed. The air seemed to thicken and grow rank with death.

"Poor young creatur'," sighed Mrs. Pope; "I remember"—and launched forth into a

biographical sketch of the dead girl's early days, which for minuteness might well rival the labours of a Boswell.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Kipps, "I dessay—what's bred in the bone 'll come out in the flesh; and they've been a sad onfortinate fam'ly. But do look at Martha—why, Martha!" catching her by the arm, "be goin' to swound?"

"Lor, no!" smiled she, "I be only a bit grieved like."

"I can't think what's come to Patty o' late," observed Mrs. Kipps, looking back at her as they, she and Mrs. Pope, strolled off towards the village—"she's no more like what she used to be than you're like me. 'Tis my belief she wants a sweet'eart!"

And Mrs. Pope laughed, and thought it not at all onlikely, and wondered 'oo there was, now that Tim Redman 'ad gone to Bridport, as might "do for 'er."

One need not be a genius, you see, in order to be misunderstood.

Left to herself—the multitude, Dicky still hero of the hour, having gradually receded in the wake of these good ladies—Martha seemed to consider the proximate issue of her goings.

Whilst dressing that morning—like one Charles Lamb this troubled soul's most brilliant moments were, as a rule, those spent before her looking-glass—the thought had struck her that in no way could she more readily or effectually test the validity of her apprehensions concerning Miss Phenie than by going to meeting and keeping her eyes open. "For," argued she, "ef she be shut up, the maister won't let Miss Rachel bide alone wi' 'er, lest she should let 'er out, and Miss Rachel won't leave the maister for fear o' what e' might do, so they'll both keep at 'ome just to watch each other."

And they had kept at home.

What should she do, then? Should she, stifling her anxiety as best she might, return by the way she came, and patiently await the call of fate; or emboldened by the possession of the very latest intelligence, which, as is well known, will atone for sufficiently grave delinquencies, including even the mutilation of a man's mother tongue, scout caution and again penetrate the hostile camp.

Being of a valiant turn, and as reckless as are most women when their sympathies are

thoroughly aroused—the King of Dahomey is a wise man to respect tradition and maintain an Amazonian bodyguard; let his Majesty possess the art of pleasing, and a well-proportioned person, and I'll wager he may laugh at his enemies, "to their noses," and take no hurt;—being of a valiant turn, then, Martha strongly inclined to this latter course, inclined indeed so strongly, that before many moments had elapsed she was walking quick and steadfast in the direction of that familiar edifice.

Twice did she knock at the Grange door, and twice did she knock fruitlessly. At length, tired of waiting, she lifted the latch, and looked in.

By the fire, in Mr. Fowke's arm-chair, sat Aunt Rachel, one elbow resting on the little round table, her head supported by her hand, her eyes bent on a yellowed page of the old brown Bible, which lay open before her.

"Good afternoon, 'm," said Martha, feeling somewhat abashed.

"Good afternoon," replied Miss Fowke.

"I thought I'd just step up and tell you as I weer passin',—Clary's dead."

Miss Fowke's eyelids drooped.

"She died this afternoon," went on Martha; "Dicky Ludlow came and told us after service."

"Indeed."

"Yes, and the minister went off theer dyrect. I suppose Mrs. Bond 'll be terrible cut up, poor soul."

"I suppose so."

Then they lapsed into silence.

"I 'ope, 'm," said Martha at length, getting a firm hold of the door, and reddening all over her face, "that you won't take it amiss, but I should like to know what's become o' Miss Phenie?"

"She is ill," was the composed answer.

"Ill!" echoed Martha—"what with?"

"Nothing much," replied Miss Fowke, and returned to her account of the opening of the bottomless pit with a quiet settledness of face and manner which plainly indicated that so far as she was concerned the interview was at an end.

Her eyes grave to fixity, likewise her mouth, Martha went her way.

Things looked worse than they had heretofore.

In the lane she met Jacob, and with a curtsey crossed the road to avoid the necessity of greeting him. She felt as if one word must let loose the entire volume of her indignation.

Scowling, he suffered her to pass, then turned as though about to speak; but no, a curse between his teeth, he walked on.

"Faythor," said Martha that night, as they two sat alone on either side of the peat fire, "don't the maister strike you as bein' a bit strange at times?"

John looked at the clock.

"Mebbe," said he.

CHAPTER XIII.

AS A FLAME.



AM sure that I need not again affirm that Wednesday was market day at Coatham, you being as well aware of that important fact—that is, if you are aware of anything connected with this history—as I am myself.

Now Martha, although not a stall-keeper, or indeed a regular attendant at this hebdomadal gathering—a gathering productive of much noise, which went by the name of "business," for the time being, suffering to the lesser creatures, notably calves, lambs, when in season, and domestic fowls, and some mischief, likewise the rapid transmutation of metals, including that speeies of brass which is occasionally discoverable in no less unwarrantable a locality than the human countenance—

Martha would sometimes, as I have already told you, make up a basket of fowls, or milk cheeses snugly packed in cabbage leaves, the very look of which gave you an appetite ; or particularly perfect apples or pears, or in summer, strawberries, in the culture of which fruit John was a great adept, with a bunch or two of bright dewy old-fashioned flowers, stocks, and carnations, and pansies, and southernwood, and Canterbury bells and moss roses—not that these latter often went to market, being for the most part sacrificed to Miss Phenie—the which she would sell for perhaps twopence apiece (think of that), and try in her dull limited way to make some small addition to the family resources, to aid fayther in beating off the " wolf."

And on the Wednesday in that week which found Clara Bond a corpse—Martha sat up all Monday night with Mrs. Bond, who had gone quite " off her head" (to venture on a colloquialism) with grief, likewise brought a little frost-bitten rosebud, the only flower to be found in either garden, and laid on the corpse's bosom—she arose betimes, filled her basket with fresh eggs, two plump ducks, and

a string of black puddings (much admired as an article of diet in those parts, specially when of her manufacture), eighteen "Normanton Wonders," a sheaf of sweet herbs, marjoram, and rue, and sage, and rosemary and thyme, and having made a good breakfast, started off, the said basket on her arm, as brisk as though she was going to a wedding.

"For," said she to Tom, as she pinned on her shawl, "if I do sell the couple—and I don't see why I shouldn't—'twill be a matter of some five shillin's, and then there's the puddin's, and I know Mrs. Baker 'll be glad o' them. Ah, you'll 'ave your new shoes at last, my boy."

It was a terrible thing to Martha for Tom not to be quite smart and prosperous. She would wear gowns that were all but threadbare herself so long as they were clean, and had had but one new bonnet in the last five years, and that was not exactly new, being an old one of Miss Fowkes' which she had had turned, but Tom, bright, handsome, capable Tom, he must always be "fittin," no other lad must be let get ahead of him, either in worth or fashion; one must go without clothes to one's

back save in so far as decency necessitated, sooner than incur, or even run the risk of incurring, that crushing calamity. Like the wild daffodils which in spring decked with quick gold the green robes of her native meadows, Martha's mind was but two shaded. Love held her always. Sometimes it was love for Miss Phenie, sometimes love for kith and kin, sometimes love for Will and those other dead ones who, when alive, had awakened her wakeful tenderness, sometimes love for the trees, the brook, the fields, the beasts, so patient and meritorious, gazing gravely at you of a summer's evening over the top bar of some gate, or hedges white with summer snow; the place where she was born, the good sun that cherished her, the great heaven that at night awed and thrilled her with its weird wastes, its splendid mysteries. I will not say which love took the deepest tint, which was the primrose, which the gold, but that love—strong sweet love, clear as those pools of flame-coloured light left by the setting sun midst western clouds, even as the receding sea fills rocky cups and feeds the thirsty shore—was her first principle, I know very well.

To return, however.

When this not at all remarkable person—it is nothing new, I hope, for a native of Great Britain, even though a female and obscure, to be susceptible to natural beauties and of an affectionate disposition—reached Coatham, the hands of the Town Hall clock, which was to other clocks as my Lord Steyne to Mr. Wagg—declared that it was exactly half-past nine. Martha was glad to find that it was no later, business being briskest in the forenoon, Coatham ladies, like other ladies, ladies resident in less illustrious townships, liking to do their shopping before dinner; so having rested awhile on the steps of the market cross, off she set upon her rounds at once. Perhaps you think it strange that with one friend about to be buried, and another afflicted with a mysterious disorder for which there was neither name nor cure, medical or otherwise (it was an accepted fact now, not only with Mr. Fowke's hired servants, but the public at large, that Miss Phenie was " laid up"), money or money-making should occupy her attention. Perhaps, even, you may suspect that I, by thus depicting her engrossed to all appearance in

mundane cares, design to draw you into the belief that, finding anxiety of no avail, she had stoically determined to be anxious no more, to cast trouble behind her, and, ears closed, content herself with the faithful discharge of obvious duties, until chance, by increasing her stock of knowledge, should open up some fresh way of usefulness.

But indeed I have no such intention. Martha might affect indifference, might seem to have no other thought than how to show off her wares to the best advantage, might chaffer, and bargain, and higgle, and persuade as dexterously and emphatically as she pleased; but let the street door be shut and the basket again upon her arm, and the active interests of life suspended for a while, and Patty was just as unhappy as ever. In her ears rang—not the cries of the fish-hawkers, the squeaks and squawks of Mr. Punch, the shouts of the drovers, the noise of waggon wheels and farmers' gigs, the voices of the waggoners and country folk with whom she brushed shoulders, but that same question which had rung in them hour after hour, day after day, for, was it centuries? The question to which there

was no answer, neither could any be devised thereto—the question—Where was Miss Phenie? Before her eyes defiled in constant procession—not the varying sights of roadway and pavement, street corner and crowded booth, but the events of the past week.

Surely the current list of polite accomplishments yet lacks one item—how to forget!

The ducks disposed of, Mrs. Perkins got them both for four and sixpence, a great bargain —and Mrs. Baker's larder enriched by certain dark and rotund objects which would that same evening afford Mr. Baker what that gentleman was wont to term "a splash supper," Martha set her face towards the market-place, intending there to make a halt and eat the bread and cheese she had brought in her pocket, diluting that same somewhat dry refection with a draught of cold water drawn from the pump; for even she, ignoramus and dullard as she was, had her prejudices, and about the most forcible of these, after that suggested by clerical attire, was against entering a beerhouse, either unattended or attended, or for any purpose whatsoever. But hardly had she set down her burden when she caught sight of

that which swept all thought of personal ease clean out of her mind, and hurried her away across the square, full speed.

"Hi, missus!" cried a tall, broad-shouldered, foxy-faced wearer of smock and wideawake—there is nothing objectionable in the vulpine visage if considered dispassionately—"you be a forgettin' of your basket!" and, snatching it up, hastened after her therewith.

"Thank ee—thank ee!" said she, taking it from him, and ran on.

The man of ruddy aspect stared, smiled, and turning to an apple-cheeked, grayheaded private in the ranks of that standing army constantly maintained by Want in support of Plenty, observed that "she'd take care 'e warn't lost for want o' leukin arter;" also asked her name and where she belonged to, adding that she "weer a well-growed 'ooman." He was a judge of such matters was this warm-looking gentleman.

"She do come fro' Shobdon," replied the veteran, commonly called Isaac Beer; "I've knowed she fro' a child. But oo's she a talkin' to? Why, 'tis sure*ly* the maister"—shading his eyes with a sunburnt hand. The sun shone bright just then.

"Maister 'oo ?" questioned the other.

"Why, Maister Fowke."

But the auburn-locked one shook his head.

"I doan't belong tu these parts," said he, "I cume from Crediton," and turned away to note the behaviour of a cow, who was being driven to the slaughter-house, and showed signs of having guessed her destination.

Isaac was right, though. It was Mr. Fowke whom Martha had accosted, charging straight up to him before she had time to reckon the cost of her temerity, and with Mr. Fowke did she still hold converse.

"What's that to you ?" demanded he, in reply to some observation or perhaps inquiry, blurted out breathlessly, possibly at random.

"I be so afear'd," exclaimed Martha, knitting up her brows, and generally assuming the air of one much exercised.

"Afraid !" echoed Jacob—"afraid of what ?"

"I dunno."

He broke out into a great laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha !" roared he, rising on his toes and slapping his leg with his riding whip—it was the same whip wherewith he gashed Tryphena's mouth ; he had just ridden over and

was having a chat with Kelson the ironmonger, when this incoherent and vehement person broke in upon his utterances—"ha, ha, ha! here's a wench who's afraid she don't know of what;" and two men who were passing, likewise a little girl carrying a mugful of beer, turned to look at the phenomenon.

There was not much stirring just then except human jaws and pewter pots and platters, so that you were glad of a fresh interest.

The phenomenon's cheeks reddened.

"But I do know," cried she; "I know well enough."

"Then," said Jacob, "you'd best tell it."

"I be 'shamed to," was the prompt answer.

The tallest of the men smiled (when a woman felt ashamed to speak of a thing, you might be sure it was worth knowing), and the man of ruddy aspect, having watched the cow round the corner, took a step in their direction.

"Oh!" smiled Mr. Fowke, "you be 'shamed to, be you? You've grown mighty modest on a sudden. Perhaps you won't be ashamed to bring me your door-key next Saturday night?"

"What do you mean, sir?" questioned Martha, frigidly.

"I mean that you're to pack—go—march," each synonym sharp, final as the thud of a bullet which strikes the target.

"Why?"

"Why!" he shouted; "because I choose you shall—because I, your master, on whom you depend for every morsel of food and drop of drink you put into your mouths, all three of ye, have made up my mind that I'll have no spies sneaking about my place."

"Spies!" echoed Martha, hotly.

"Yes, spies," he reiterated.

"I am no spy," she retorted, drawing herself up, and looking about as grand as a woman could—yes, though she had a big wicker basket on her arm, a basket full of hens' eggs.

"Ain't you?" sneered he, "then what d'ye come sniffing and snuffing about my back door for, poking your nose into what does not concern you? I've been interfered with enough. You bring me your key and take yourselves off, or it'll be the worse for ye."

"Mr. Fowke," said Martha, "you're doin'

that you'll be ashamed of; both at 'ome and abroad you're doin' that you'll be ashamed of. What!" holding out her hand, palm uppermost —"turn faything out o' 'is cottage, weer mother died, and we was all born'd,—and a fine crazy 'ole it is too, as full o' rents as a Frenchman's jacket"—not without irony—"but that doan't matter—turn faything, I say, oo's worked for you true and faithful these fifty years, out into the road just cause you're vexed wi' I! And what for? Ah, you may grind your teeth; you can't slash my face here, out in open day-light, as you slashed your own child's last Thursday in the dark, and——"

"Silence!" shouted Jacob, "or I'll hand ye to the constable!"

"'And me," cried Martha—"'and me, and see what'll come of it. I've more to tell than ever you 'ave, I'll warrant," with a meaningful nod.

"You bring me your key," he reiterated, "you insolent devil!" These three words slowly, through clenched teeth.

"Devil yourself!" retorted Martha, and stood glaring at him out of her red-brown eyes like any tigress.

"You bring me your key!" said he again, and having elbowed his way through the crowd which had gathered about them, crossed the street, followed by eyes expressive partly of surprise, partly of reprobation. It was a cruel thing, some persons thought—among whom stood prominent the warm-looking gentleman—to give a family notice to quit at a moment's warning, as you might say, without grave occasion.

"What du 'e be so teuk-to abeut?" inquired this sympathetic personage, when the commotion had subsided a little, and one was at liberty to form a conclusion.

"Lord knows!" sobbed Martha, who now that her passion had burnt itself out, was crying as if her heart would break, the tears streaming through her knitted fingers, her great shoulders working wofully.

"Well, but," said one of the women who stood at her elbow, "what do all this be about the darter? ain't she"——

"Doan't ee ask I!" broke forth Martha—"doan't ee ask I ne'er a word. I done quite enough!" and with a great sigh, pulled up, as it were, from the bottommost depths, brushed

back her hair, hugged her basket closer, and trudged away, her heart in her throat, her mind in such a state of uproar and agony that she would, I am sure, have thanked you had you felled her as you might a mad bullock.

"Lor' !" exclaimed the man of ruddy aspect, who had a soft heart of his own as well as a sharp pair of eyes. "Let I carry it," said he, laying a hand on the basket handle.

But she shook her head.

"No, thank ee," she answered, toiling on.

The Creditonian kept pace with her.

"I'll tell ye what," observed he at length, in the tone of one who felt himself to be intellectually in advance of his fellow-creatures. But what he would tell her must for ever remain a mystery, for at that very moment—they were passing the George—up dashed a postchaise and pair, and as the post-boy checked his cattle, out jumped Robert Valoynes—yes, indeed, really and truly, out jumped Robert Valoynes.

"Oh !" exclaimed Martha, and staggered back against the wall.

And Robert said, "Who could have thought it ?" and laughed and caught hold of her hand

and shook it—shook it as if he would never leave off shaking it—and then took her by the arm and told her she must come and drink his health and tell him all the news, and, above all, what she was crying about; and altogether conducted himself so as to startle everybody, even the waiter and—the man of ruddy aspect?

"My stars!" ejaculated the man of ruddy aspect, "but that's rum!" and went and had a pint of cider at once to drown his astonishment.

CHAPTER XIV.

EACH WAY A RUIN.

"MY dear Martha," exclaimed Robert, setting forth the best chair in the best inn's best room, and by a wave of the hand praying her to be therein seated, "you cannot imagine how charmed I am to see you again. Bring some luncheon, waiter. Anything—steaks, chops, it does not matter, so that it can be done quickly. This keen bright weather sharpens one's appetite, but it is not nearly so cold here as it was when I left the north; there we were snowed up waist deep. And how are you, Martha, and how is everybody? Sit down, do."

But Martha only smiled.

"I bean't fit to be up 'ere," said she, "in my old gown, and with this 'ere great basket," eyeing that same deprecatorily.

"Gown—basket!" echoed Robert; "what are gowns and baskets compared to you and me? Come, I won't have you stiff and ridiculous. Just be yourself, will you?" laying his hand on her shoulder and giving her a small shake.

"I be myself too much," was the dejected answer. "Oh, sir," her eyes brimfull again, "you can't think what's 'appened since you've been away."

Robert's face, hitherto bright with playful remonstrance, gloomed over.

"What do you mean?" he questioned.

For a while she stood silent, then she said inquiringly, "Miss Phenie wrote to you?"

"Yes," he replied, "that is how I came to be here, but she did not tell me anything particular except that Mr. Latchet——" an ironical smile playing about his mouth.

"Mr. Latchet!" broke forth Martha, "I wish Mr. Latchet was at the bottom of the sea."

Robert laughed.

"I don't!" he rejoined, "for the sake of the fish. But, seriously, I was afraid something had gone wrong directly I saw that you were

in tears. Poor Martha!" quite tenderly—"I have so often thought of you during these last two months."

"And I of you, sir," said Martha, heaving another of those great sighs, "and wished, and longed, and prayed that you had never gone away—without taking Miss Phenie along of you, at least. Yes, though to part with 'er would be to me like tearin' the live 'eart out o' my bosom!"

"I would have," he said, quietly, "if her devotion to her father had not been so—so marked!"

"Ay," smiled Martha, "and well 'e's paid 'er."

Robert's eyes grew curious.

"It's just a toss up in my mind," went on this grim and woful young woman, "whether she ain't dead a'ready."

"Dead!" he echoed, frowning incredulously.

"Ay," she reiterated—"dead!"

"Good God!" he cried, clapping both hands to his head.

"Of course," pursued Mistress Pessimist, "I can't say for certain"—she, you see, had dwelt upon, and hung over, and handled this

horror of hers on such wise, that now, familiarity having blunted sense, she could give it the benefit of her candid and extended criticism without any very considerable outlay of emotion, even as persons dwelling in a plague-stricken city will run against coffins and elbow their way through, and past funeral trains with as little concern as though they were dispersing a knot of loitering school-children—"I can't say for certain," she pursued, then, "but that she's 'id away somewhere's plain. They say she's ill; if she is, why mayn't I see 'er? I sat with 'er often enough when she 'ad the measles; besides, no doctor goes to the 'ouse. I tell you, Mr. Robert, I don't believe she's any more ill, not nat'rally, that is, than either you or I. She's locked up, that's what she is, and shame I say, shame, shame, shame on the brute oo's done it, and the brute as lets it be done!"

"But Miss Fowke," said Robert, "surely she——"

"Miss Fowke!" scoffed Martha—"Miss Fowke's no better nor Mister! Theer's not a pin to choose atwixt 'em. Indeed, I think if anything she be the worst o' the two. You

see," dryly, "she weer so set on bein' Mrs. Minister!"

"Ha!"

"I thought," continued he at length, "that she had a sneaking liking for the fellow; and Tryphena said in her letter that she was very indignant at his having made her an offer. But I could never have imagined that she would have allowed herself to be urged by pique into—— Oh, my poor darling! my poor darling!" quite distractedly.

"Ah!" said Martha, "you'd 'a' called 'er poor indeed if you'd seed 'er as I did last Thursday night with 'er dear face all smeared with blood, and that old beast a drivin' 'er off before 'im, 'is whip in 'is hand, just as you might drive a——"

"Martha!" exclaimed Robert, clenching his right hand, "I am going mad. Get out of my way; I'll go to Shobdon at once—I'll——"

"Stay!" she cried, catching him by the arm (he turned and glared at her as might one delirious)—"you'll do no good—wait till the mornin'. Yes, do ee, now," entreatingly—"do ee, theer's a dear sweet gentleman!"

"But they'll murder her!" in accents of the keenest agony.

"They'll murder 'er if you go settin' up their backs without first tyin' their 'ands. Don't you see the man's not theer? 'e's over 'eer, and you can do nowt 'gainst t'other."

"Why not? You say that there's not a pin to choose between them!"

"She wouldn't let you in; she'd shut the door in your face just as she's shut it in mine; besides, you couldn't bide theer all day, and then theer'd be the night. No! don't you be rash. Rec'lleck two 'eads are better nor one. I've turned it all over, and I think I know what must be done—but not to-day; why, 'tis a pound to a farden that the maister goes 'ome three parts drunk—'e do most market nights now—and I believe myself 'e's 'ad a wet a'ready!"

"Why," questioned Robert, "have you seen him?"

"Yes," she smiled.

Here the jingling sound of swiftly-borne glass and crockery proclaimed that the waiter had regained the stairs.

"You'll stay and have something to eat?"

said Mr. Valoynes, as that functionary opened the door, and proceeded with his burden to the table, and his tone was courteous as though he addressed a duchess. There was no depth of woe so profound that in his descent thither this young man would lose his good breeding.

But Martha shook her head.

"No, thank ee, sir!" she replied; "I must be gettin' 'ome, 'twill soon be dark. But I'm glad to 'ave 'ad just this bit o' chat!" This out of an artful desire to keep up appearances.

Robert walked to the window. He was past caring what people thought of him.

The waiter, who was an astute old gentleman, and could see more with the tail of one eye than most persons with the whole of two, flourished off the covers, observed "Lunch is ready, sir!" and bowed himself out of the room with happiest alacrity.

"You'd better change your mind," smiled Robert, when they were alone again, "as for me, I can't touch a morsel, and it will be a bad compliment to the cook to send everything away as it came. Please"—with his old air of whimsical entreaty—"do oblige me by rebelling against your inclinations."

"No," said Martha, "I really don't want nothin'. I'm like you—when my 'eart's full my inside may go empty!" and sighed, like one whose heart was very full indeed, so full, in fact, that it was a wonder it did not run over.

Robert considered her with some intentness. He had been too thoroughly engrossed in his own perplexities, from almost the first moment of their meeting, to have as yet paid much heed to her appearance.

"Do you know," said he at length—she underwent the ordeal with fine fortitude, almost as though she were proud of being subjected thereto—"that you're not looking at all well. I hope John's all right?"

"Yes, thank ee, sir," she made answer, seeming to wrestle with affliction, "fayther be sprack enough!"

"And your brother?"

"Yes, sir. Tom don't ail nothin'."

"Then, what vexes you? I mean over and above all that you have told me; for I am sure that there is something?"

"Well, sir," said Martha, swinging round and holding up her apron to her mouth, and

reddening to the roots of her crisp, bright hair, "I'm not much of a one to trouble others with my troubles, but I don't mind tellin' you. We've got notice to quit. I chanced to see 'im in the market-place, and asked after Miss Phenie, which put 'im out terrible, and 'e abused me shockin'—yes, shockin'; called me a devil, and I don't know what—and I'm to take 'im the key next Saturday."

Robert looked his sympathy.

"Tain't for myself I minds," pursued she brokenly; "what I do feel be nowt. 'Tis fayther that I'm grieved for: 'e's gettin' on, you see, and old folks, like old trees, won't bear transplantin', they droops and pines, and—and dies they does," her voice quivering into a sob.

"My good girl," said Robert, advancing and laying his hand upon her shoulder—he was of a kindly turn, though unable to apprehend the moral loveliness of wholesale butchery—"my good girl, I feel for you with all my heart!"

"I know it, sir!" she murmured; "don't think I can't fathom folks."

"But you must not be cast down. As long as I live you have a home. I know very well why this blow has fallen on you!" not without a dash of bitterness.

Another woman might have humbly dropped him a curtsey, burst out into fervent protestations of never-ceasing gratitude, generally acted up to the occasion.

Martha only shook her head.

"'Tis fayther," said she, and drying her eyes, turned to the door.

"But I shall see you again?" exclaimed our Quixote.

She paused.

"When shall you be over to Shobdon?" she asked, looking round at him questioningly.

"You say it would be unwise to go to-day?"

"I do."

"Then I shall come to-morrow—to-morrow *early*," with resolution.

"Shall you walk or ride?"

"I don't know."

"I ask because if you walked and chanced to go back by the short cut we might 'appen to meet. I've got to take a dozen eggs to

Mrs. Rigby by eleven, and as 'er 'ouse isn't far from—from the minister's, I shall most likely come back that way."

"I see!" said Robert, and seemed to think; "very well," added he at length; "I'll bear that in mind. You'll be crossing the fields about half-past eleven?"

"Yes," nodded Martha, "about 'alf-past eleven," and then, with a final "Good-day, sir," took her departure.

"Oh!—how de do?" exclaimed Dr. Sprague, hurrying across the street as she quitted the inn (Robert saw him from his window, whence he gazed gloomily, brows knit, his hands thrust into his trousers pockets)—"how de do? It isn't true, I suppose, that Mr. Valoynes is amongst us?"

"I dunno!" said Martha, stolidly.

"No, to be sure not!" smiled the doctor; "only," with emphasis, "a friend of mine said that he saw him go into the George!"

"'Deed!" said Martha, and the doctor hobbled on.

"Oh!—how de do?" beamed he, running against Mr. Latchet at the corner of Friar Street; "have you heard the news?"

"No," replied Acts with his wonted composure.

"Valoynes has come west again. He's staying at the George!"

Robert saw that too.

"My poor Phenie," thought he—"my poor Phenie!"

CHAPTER XV.

RAPID AND VIVID AND DUMB AS A DREAM.

AND now for a brief talk about Robert — about his method or methods of disposing of the time which has elapsed since he pressed that saddest of things earthly—when you come to think of it—a farewell kiss on those lips he holds sweeter than all flowers; the duties he has been engaged in; the solaces he has enjoyed. Of these latter, I fear, the roll will be a meagre one; of the former, however, he has known no stint.

The sun was going down as he, perched on a high green gig—Silvertail having been left at Winchester to be brought home in a week or two by easy stages, and a groom specially despatched for that purpose,—emerged from the

grand lime avenue which, when the world was green, made an odorous aisle of boughs and twisted stems from lodge to lawn, and came within sight of his gray old home. To the right stretched still purple solitudes, deepening here and there to brownish black, where the heather had been fired by some upland farmer for the sake of the sweet juicy herbage springing at its roots, and best of feasts to upland sheep. To the left spread dark woods, backed by great hills, flushed, where the native rock spurned the thyme-scented turf and sombre overgrowth of last year's bracken and leafless bramble bushes, to a dull red by the crimson glory of the wind-swept sky. Not a soul was visible, not a sound to be heard save those pertaining to the birds and beasts. Overhead the rooks cawed sleepily and flapped from branch to branch, intent on the appropriation of suitable quarters for the night; every now and then a roosting sparrow or chaffinch, one of the hedge-haunting families, would utter a plaintive chirp. From the Home farm, situate in the middle of the park, and at present held by Mrs. Agar's brother-in-law (Robert had some idea, when this worthy man should have taken his de-

parture either to a better world or one of those editions of Paradise on a reduced scale whereto he would so frequently make deft and touching allusion, of working this freehold on the co-operative principle, he himself being one of the operators, but that, by reason of its present occupant's remarkable tenuity of will and constitution, was necessarily a matter of quite future import)—from the Home farm, I say, came screeching of geese, the shrill scream of an irritable bull, the mild lowing of milch cows, the lengthy crow of an exultant cock; —as Robert rounded the gravel sweep in front of the hall door, a peacock, probably from the terrace, piped a raucous welcome.

"How quiet it all is!" said he, as Nutt the old coachman, who ran by his side when he took his first canter on his Shetland pony—nay, had sat on the box of the coach-and-four which whirled his father and mother away from the church door after they were married, got down and took The Haymaker by the bit; "I could believe that you've every one of you been sound asleep ever since I left."

But Nutt shook his head.

"Naa, sir," smiled he—"naa sich look as

The next sun had barely risen, when Matthew Thwaites, his hand in Robert's, on his lips a prayer for that young man's well-being, fell on sleep. Of a keen intellect and strong affections, like many another of his race and rearing, the old man, invigorated by his master's presence, retained his mental powers to the last, and during the night heard with gladness that a mistress would soon be given to Kirton.

"And what's she like, sir?" inquired he, smiling the sweet languid smile of perfect happiness. There was nothing, and no one, so dear to this foolish soul as "Mr. Robert."

"Like," said Robert—"like Mereglen on a fine April evening—like the smell of primroses —like the violet-stain made on the library-floor by King Richard's cloak in the west window. I cannot tell you what she is like, for she is like nothing actual, but rather that which is hidden in it, and only peeps out at times, just to show that the whole world is one and eternal."

"You've not forgotten how to talk, any-way," smiled Matthew, who had heard a good deal of nonsense in his time—nonsense

mingled with the brawling gossip of mad becks, the drowsy whisperings of leaves, the savage bluster of chill winds, the mournful rhythm of church bells. Robert, when a long, scatter-brained, Lord Byron-idolizing lad, knew no greater pleasure than a trudge with Thwaites along rough moor roads, over the fresh-turned furrows, through pungent pine woods, rich in unbarred melody; "you've not forgotten how to talk, anyway," smiled this recipient of boyish vagaries; "but I hope she's good as well as handsome. It's a pity that I've got to go without getting just a glint at her."

"Matthew," said Robert, earnestly, tightening his hold on four numb fingers, "she is as good as are your angels. When you see them you will see her," and his voice shook, and he bit his lip, for it hurt him to be thus.

The steward laid to rest in a quiet corner of the little green churchyard, full of the plain bodies of those plain folks who in past days had eaten the bread of carefulness, and clothed the fields with flocks, and made the valleys to rejoice and sing, and God blessed his Majesty, and bobbed and pulled forelocks to the vicar, and, above all, believed that no such betters

as those having the dominion over them, and called Valoynes, were to be found, did you search the wide world through ;—the steward buried, and a chestnut tree planted near his grave, he was so fond of chestnuts,—of a May night he would stand gazing up into the gracious gloom of that which grew at his cottage door, uplifting her sweet flowers, like rosy flames lit in praise of God, for half hours at a time—(Robert nourished a robust suspicion that it was under a chestnut tree that he first kissed Maggie Buck, she who jilted him so foully, running away to London with Hertford Brackenbury, otherwise known as captain, scamp and blackguard, in circles polite and unpolite throughout Great Britain ; but Matthew had never volunteered any confidence thereanent—indeed, from the hour in which he learned his humiliation, the girl's name never escaped his lips), the next thing to be done was to look about for his successor. Oh, grim Necessity! Art not thou verily and indeed the Satan of this age, and every age either that has been or is, or has to come?

At first Robert thought that he would undertake the post himself—middle men being

the objects of his heartiest aversion, the pegs whereon he was prone to hang those audacious and not quite ineloquent harangues wherewith he occasionally regaled the ears of church and county.

But on consideration he found that the duties thereto attached were of a nature incompatible alike with personal freedom and that separateness of vision, combined with identity of interest, which is essential if a hirer would be of service to those he hires; so, after many talks with Mrs. Agar—who was a far-seeing old body, and well in communion with the hopes, doubts, and methods of thought common to those amongst whom she diligently clung to duty, and the faith as it was at Kirton—and a lonely walk or two, and some arithmetic, it was finally decided that Noah Wynn, a smart young fellow, who had been Matthew's right-hand man, should step into the vacant niche, and our landed proprietor resume that most difficult of all *rôles*—if effect be a consideration—a gentleman at large. Not an idle gentleman, though—by no means. Indeed, I do not think it would have been possible for Robert

to have been idle under any circumstances whatever—even though tied hand and foot, and under pain of death if he wagged an eye-lash.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Agar one morning, when he had made an end of telling her how that he intended to build a conservatory on to the drawing-room—a conservatory wherein should play a fountain, for the refreshment of gold fish, who would grace their native element in a shell-garnished tank specially constructed for that purpose; and how the rose garden must be laid out again, and lots of tulips planted in the front beds, so that when April came she might get a nosegay to her liking, and how, and how, and how; "Ah, Mr. Robert," said Mrs. Agar, "but Love's a fine enlightener! You'd never 'ave thought of one of these things if you 'adn't met that villain!"

Robert laughed.

"Not that," pursued she gravely, "you need love 'im; but—you know what I mean!"

"You know what I mean," was the ever-open postern door in the fortress of understanding, through which Mrs. Agar's ideas, when slightly unsteady in their gait and in-

clined to lurch up against each other, would precipitately flee, either singly or *en masse*.

"Yes," smiled Robert, rolling up a plan for a new coach-house, to which he had been giving his best attention—"yes, I understand perfectly."

And he did.

For whether he strolled through the stables, and chatted amicably with Nutt about the bay's right frog or Robin Hood's left shoulder, or conversed feelingly with Gunner the gardener concerning the renovation of certain hothouses, which had in their time furnished fruits fit not only to set before a king, but a king of the old breed—kings who had a knack of dying across the water—but now were given up to mildew and cobwebs and divers specimens of the smaller kinds of beasts, or blazed trees for slaughter—in order to improve the view—or stood meditating in the room that had been madam's boudoir,—it still was hung with blueish grey satin, and bore traces in the shape of an ebony spinning-wheel, inlaid with ivory, a Book of Beauty full of portraits—heaven save the mark!—of the button-mouthed, pencilled-eyebrowed, dis-

tractingly amiable-looking women who at the beginning of this century, about the time that Byron was dreaming out his "Hours of Idleness," queened it modishly over the ravished crowd; and a high-backed, thin-toned piano, the white notes of which were yellowed with age, and depressed centrally as by the constant touch of dead people's fingers, and whose legs seemed to have run to seed like overgrown asparagus—whatever this infatuated young man might be doing, or saying, or thinking, I repeat, Tryphena kept close to him. It was to please Tryphena, to regale her eyes with gorgeous red and gold, brimming goblets of glowing chrome, that he ordered those tulips to be planted; it was to provide her with amusement that he fought so hard against fate and the dull perversity of the Carlisle fishmonger to secure inmates for his tank. "She will go and feed them after breakfast," he thought, when, the deep having at length yielded up its treasure, he stood and watched some twelve aureate and bottle-nosed little creatures glide and dart beautifully over the bits of quartz and corals; it was to secure her a pleasant retreat from

everybody, even him—there was a quite grand unselfishness about that, he fancied—that he sent for upholsterers from London, and desired that the little room aforesaid should be redecorated not only in the newest style, but that most pleasing to the cultivated eye.

"Any pertickler complexion, sir?" inquired Messrs. Priestley and Docket's head man, when Robert had fully set forth his views, likewise intimated that the calls of nature must be as liberally responded to as the resources of the Hall buttery and larder would allow.

But to this searching query no answer was vouchsafed, beyond a suppressed laugh as soon as the study door was shut.

Yes, in his way, Robert desired to set his house in order, and make it fair in the eyes of his Beloved, even as had Acts. He had plenty of money and good materials to work with, thanks to the great Mother. Acts was poor and had no materials at all worth speaking of; but the wish was identical in the minds of both men, and yet one rouses your sympathy, the other your contempt! Verily, this old mortality of ours is of a more homogeneous sort than we are willing to acknowledge—we

others who, too, have our little failings, our missing links in the moral harness.

Nevertheless, though this very alert and fervent gentleman was thus actively engaged in preparing for change and the inauguration of a better way of life (solitude now was not quite what solitude had been, say at the commencement of the preceding year), of definite intentions he was somewhat destitute. That he should go back to Shobdon some day, also that some day he should bring Tryphena to Kirton, he could not permit himself to doubt; when those twin events would actually take place, however, was more than he felt equal to decide.

"It will be!" said he to himself, "and unless I am here to see that things are done as I wish them to be, all my trouble will be clean thrown away. No! I will content myself with getting ready for the present, for it *will* be, of that I am certain."

So he locked up Aunt Rachel's letter in his many-drawered, ink-splashed and speckled writing-table, and rang the bell for Richard, the old butler, a bent nut-cracker-faced little airy godfather (if there could be such an

anomaly—of a man, and bade him tell William to get the dog-cart ready, for he meant to drive over to Upwater to see Burnaby about those Himalayan firs, and tried to be as contented and cheerful and taken up with trivialities as he possibly could; still, he was not quite at his ease, not quite impervious to the gentle hints of memory, to a sense that he should properly be doing otherwise than he did, though what to do, or how to do it, he had no notion.

Thus, when Tryphena's letter came to hand—and he in a twinkling learnt how matters had progressed, this veil hung by self 'twixt fact and perception vanished with a breath; architects' plans, upholsterers' devices, gardeners' suggestions, even his own cherished ideas and projects, became as though they were not, shot rubbish-wise into oblivion. He sat down, wrote hard for some ten minutes, lit a taper, melted a bit of sealing-wax into a great molten blotch, impressed thereon his initials and coat of arms—cut into a great plain gold ring, which had belonged to a Robert Valoynes, who having fought a good fight, found a good death on the banks of a river called the Boyne—hurried

to his room, packed up some clothes, and telling Mrs. Agar that he was going away for a little while, and that she must expect him when she saw him, also that the men were to go on with what they had to, also that she was to see that they carried out his instructions, got into his gig, Nutt again by his side (he would take to the night coach at Ambleside, and started off south, at the utmost speed at which an impatient lover could possibly travel at that darkened period.

"Well, to be sure!" said Mrs. Agar to Richard, as she recovered from her last curtsey.

And Richard shook his old bald head with its thin fringe of silvery hair, and caressed his nose meaningly.

He had, for all his dim-sightedness, spelt out the postmark on that letter.

It was, I think, about the ninth hour on Thursday morning, both by decree of the Town Hall clock and consent of other horological units, when this indefatigable champion of private rights, having made a sufficiently substantial breakfast,—the man whose appetite depends on the state of his mind, is

seldom worth much either as a lover or an ally,—put on his hat, and bidding mine host a smiling good-morning as he passed the bar, stepped out into the street and up the street, and away on to the king's high road—the high road to Shobdon.

The day was singularly fine, with a quiet genial air, if you looked only at the sky and kept the window shut, indeed—as did Tryphena, if you remember, on the Friday morning immediately succeeding his departure. Robert had, while eating his broiled kidneys and muffins, thought that but for the small-talk of the fire at his back, he might very well, and with a fair show of reason, have believed himself to have slept away not eight hours, but something like four months and a half, and to be about to issue forth into a world of miracles, and song, and pleasantness. Alack! specious illusion. Still, though the wind, what there was of it, did blow straight in his face, and take liberties with his nose, and deal hardly by his ears, and in the pale sunshineless sunshine—like to the smile of one who, being sad at heart, converses gaily with a stranger—the naked earth lay gaunt

and grim, and he had of a surety plenty to trouble him, our visionary was not troubled. Without being foolhardy, or perhaps what is called sanguine, he was by no means inclined to make the worst of things. Besides, all assertions and observations were possessed, according to him, of two properties, the Actual and the Accidental, whereof the latter generally preponderated. Therefore, though quite willing to allow that Martha had cause, and good cause, for apprehension, he still could not believe that matters at the Grange were quite as black as she had represented them. "It is possible," he thought, as he strode over the crisp white ground, the morsels of ice scrumping beneath his feet like fresh-baked biscuits, "that my darling may be ill, but Martha takes things into her head." And then he remembered how one night, just as Miss Fowke had lit his candle, and he was about to go to bed, she, the alarmist, had violently flung open the back door, bounced into their midst, and having demanded in a loud voice, "What *'ad* become of faything?" burst into tears, and declared that that excellent man "must be lyin' somewhere murdered, or at

the bottom of the canal, for that 'e'd never stayed out so late before—no, not onst," and created such a to-do, that at length, just to pacify her, the master himself took a lantern and went forth with much grumbling to seek the truant; when—every ditch being ransacked, and the farm turned into a very Babel, the cocks and hens fancying that getting-up time had come again, and the cows that they were going to be milked, and the pigs that there was a prospect of speedy breakfast, in fact, as Aunt Rachel caustically observed, "the whole neighbourhood set by the ears"—he was found calmly seated at his own table, eating his supper, his mind as innocent of offence as yours. Robert laughed as he recalled the divers incidents of that enlivening hour—laughed, and quickened his pace.

"I don't believe they would be actually cruel to her," he mused; "I don't believe they could. You can't live down the convictions of years in a day, be the incentive thereto what it will; and bigoted as they are, and without a leg to stand upon, still, their *formulæ* do mean something to them; moreover," with an ironical curve of the lips, "it is not recorded,

that I am aware, in any portion of Holy Writ that a man is to turn brute because his daughter happens to object to the individual whom he has selected for her husband."

How sweetly familiar was every rood of that straight broad road! Here was the gate over which he and Tryphena had stood and feasted their eyes on the unspeakable splendours of not one sunset, but twenty, marvelling the while at the obtuseness of people who spent thousands of pounds on pictures, having eyes in their heads and this world to live in. It was on that bit of green, there—you can see where they lit their fire still—that they one evening found a gipsy family encamped—granddame, father and mother, two big boys, a grown-up daughter, and a baby—flashing-eyed, laughing-mouthed, lithe-bodied outcasts, the lads, with yellow handkerchiefs knotted about their lean brown throats, lying full sprawl before the tent door, one on his side, one on his back, his hands clasped over his head, blinking lazily up at the flushed bright sky; the girl riving alder boughs from out the hedge to keep the gnats off Minimus natu as he slumbered peacefully on a heap of hay, near a big-jointed, hairy-

hoofed, rough-coated, skew-bald horse, who, barebacked, cropped the dry grass, and at whom Paterfamilias, a short black pipe between his lips, his fur cap cocked knowingly over his left ear, gazed with critical intentness, whilst the granddame and the mother tended the cherished pot; and as they paused to view this bit of home life among the homeless, the girl had turned and looked at Tryphena—looked at them both, indeed, first with cool haughtiness, as is the way of them, then smilingly (what splendid teeth she had, and what eyes! No Shah's dancing-girl could boast lovelier), —and then came and asked if she should not tell them their fortunes; and Tryphena said "No," but he let her tell his; and he was to be lucky, and wed with the sweetest little lady—"not a fair lady, and not a dark, but just half-and-half, like this," said the gipsy girl, and pointed to a spray of pink geranium, the which she had found upon the dusty road, dropped from some carriage, and tucked in among her great sleek braids of beautiful coal-black hair—and he would soon go a journey, and——but what good was there in dwelling on these dead

hours, fair hours, and precious, but to the living present, Robert sighed. At the top of the lane, I say—oh that I did not know so much of you, you seven best friends, that I might be able to stay my garrulous tongue, and deal only with your exterior and visible performances—he encountered Isaac.

"Woy!" exclaimed that wiry and ancient personage, pulling up short and gazing wonder-struck.

"Well," said Robert, laughing and holding out his hand, "am I such a very astounding spectacle?"

"I dunno zactly what that may be," said Isaac, rubbing his red and hardened palm on the skirt of his sage-green greatcoat, intended to be brown; "but anyways, I'se glad to see ye," and they shook hands heartily.

It was curious how soon you became intimate with and attached to Mr. Valoynes.

"I s'pose, sir," said Isaac, when he had quivered himself back to something like composure, "you be bound for the Graange?"

"Yes," said Robert, "is Mr. Fowke at home?"

"Ay," replied Isaac; "I'se just took'd 'e a letter"—and paused. "Miss Tryphena," he

went on, at length, "be a bit poorly, I do. 'ear, 'deed I doubt but she's a-bed. I ain't seed nothin' on 'er fur a day or two."

"Really!" said Robert; "well, I mustn't stop. Good-day!"

"Good-day, sir," said Isaac, raising his weather-worn hat, and hobbled on.

A certain young man's self-confidence began to flag.

His face very grave, he walked quickly away down the lane. Arrived within sight of the house, on whom should his eyes light but Mr. Fowke—Mr. Fowke, standing at the farmyard gate, intent on the perusal of a letter, the which he held open in his hand. At first his preoccupation was such that he remained quite unconscious of any one's approach; then he looked up, started, turned on his heel, and walked slowly, setting his feet down with unnatural deliberation, as if he would compel himself by sheer force to maintain an appearance of dignified composure, across the road and up the garden path, slamming the green gate behind him, and latching it with fine expressiveness.

"Stay!" exclaimed Robert, hurrying forward—"one moment."

Jacob faced round, laughed derisively, and,

entering the house, banged the door, and drew both bolts, top and bottom.

For a brief space Robert stood irresolute, his cheeks crimson—the insult was no petty one—down in the depths of his dark blue eyes gleamed a red fire not good to look upon. But he was in no mood to play suppliant; a minute and he had turned his back on the bleak old house, and all that therein was, he thought in the first fervour of his wrath.

Suddenly a window rattled high up to his rear.

"Mr. Valoynes—Mr. Valoynes!" screamed some one—some one feminine.

Still he paused not; nay, I doubt whether he even knew that he was being called.

"Mr. Valoynes!" came one other cry.

Then all was quiet. The blackbirds piped shrilly in the hedges, a noise of hammering issued from the barn, a boy whistled "The British Grenadiers" right merrily, in good tune and time, as he toiled at the plough's tail—a plough drawn by two horses over the great purplish clods of rich life-giving earth—two men who with a cart occupied a prominent position in a neighbouring field, paused

in their labours—they were tossing manure about with pitchforks—to stare, as, swift and furious, Robert strode past the gate. The church clock chimed jerkily a quarter to eleven; all was peaceful, industrious, English to the core.

Out of doors, that is; indoors, in the Grange, in fact, matters wore a somewhat different complexion. There the aspect of life might be English, likewise industrious; but that it was at that particular moment peaceful I do most stoutly deny.

Having, whilst engaged in making her bed, caught the sound of a violently-shut gate, also heavy feet, upon the cobbles, also disdainful laughter, Aunt Rachel had unfastened her window, and putting out her head, become aware that the very identical individual on whom her thoughts had, with untiring agility, been running for days and days and days was actually in sight, was—oh, horror—getting farther off and farther every moment. So she called to him, and, finding that he paid no heed to her appeals, rushed downstairs, intending to dash out, and race after him, and force him to——

But Jacob was too quick for her. He had his shoulders against the door before she was fairly out of the hall.

"Ha!" smiled he, noticing her look of discomfiture.

"Let me out!" she cried; "I"——

"Hold thy peace," interrupted he, gloomily —he had been pleased of late to adopt this somewhat antiquated style of phraseology—

"No," said she—"that will I not—not for all the black looks and thees and thous in the world! You let me out!

"If I do," was the dogged answer, "'twill be as a dead carcass."

Whereat she shrank back, and reddened affrightedly. She was only a woman.

"But," cried she at length, in the tone of one who waxed desperate, "I shall lose him. He will——"

"Lose him!" echoed Jacob, scornfully.

"Yes," she retorted—"lose him as I have lost peace of mind and flesh and power to sleep, and almost everything worth having that I had. Do you think"—wringing her hands, and speaking at the top of her voice—"that I am going to be concerned in murder?"

"Look you here!" said Jacob slowly, holding her eyes captive, as might a cobra those of a doomed bird—"you speak to me again like that, and"—a significant pause—"mind, there are but two of us!"

Again did Miss Fowke's spirit quail, and again did it rally.

"Why, man!" cried she, her face brilliant with indignation, "you talk like any ruffian ripe for Newgate!"

"Do I?" smiled he, "then thou'dst best not tempt me to put deeds for words," and walked off to the window, his hands in his pockets, grunting—no other word do I find adequate—

"Lo, He comes, in clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain,
Thousand thousand saints attending,
Swell the triumph of His train."

"Ah!" said Aunt Rachel, wrestling with the bottom bolt, which worked stiffly, "and it'll be a wonder to me if He don't come, too, for I'm sure the Devil's quick enough, and as for Gog and Magog, no one need go far to look for them!"

But to this remark no reply was made.

She was allowed to follow up the trail, in backwood parlance, as rapidly as she saw fit.

"Well," said Jacob, grinning sardonically, when, pinched with cold, her nose and cheeks whole-tinted, her face expressive of profound and keen disappointment, she, some ten minutes later, re-entered the kitchen—"ye didn't get much good by going, did ye? The bird flew too fast to let you catch him. You should have taken a pinch of salt to——"

"Hold your ribald tongue!" quoth she, the tears sparkling in her eyes, her chin all a-quiver, and sinking down on a chair, laid her head on the table and cried bitterly.

Oh, if he would but have hearkened to her!

Meanwhile the "he" in question was fast making his way towards a certain upper chamber, and a clear understanding of what he meant to do when he got there. That Martha had not overstated the situation was tolerably evident.

"What a blind fool I have been," thought he, savagely, "I might have known she would not have spoken and looked like that without good reason. It is not all over

though. All over! How can I bear to put those two words together?"

But on a sudden thought congealed.

Before his uplifted eyes stood the minister—stood as though—he had just rounded the bend in the road, which had hitherto hidden him from view—stricken powerless by astonishment.

The expression of Robert's countenance hardened, and his nostrils took a haughtier curve. He did not know it; he was as incapable of acting contempt now at the age of six-and-twenty as when in his cradle; but we all have our tricks of feature. He walked on, head well up, mouth closed and firm, very resolute, very superior.

Acts, on the contrary, his momentary dismay got the better of, advanced step by step, and as they drew near to each other, a feeble smile flickered wanly about his mouth.

"How do you—" commenced he, civilly, when Robert was within greeting distance; he was of such a civil turn, so opposed to anything like harshness or irregularity.

But the final "do" collapsed invertebrate. Regarding him steadily straight in the eyes,

Robert strode by in most expressive silence—silence more eloquent a thousand times than the bitterest speech—silence which said as plainly as it could well be said: "You are a pitiful scoundrel, and not fit for an honest man to utter one syllable unto!"

Did Acts so interpret it?

Strangely pale, his teeth set hard together—you could see them, a white ferine line, between curled lips—he turned and gazed after his antagonist until that gentleman had, veering sharp off to the right, vaulted over the stile which gave admission to the first of those meadows, in the third whereof stood the King's Tree; then he resumed his walk, stepping out brisk and firm, and slashing the hemlock sprays and broad dock leaves with his great walking-stick as though at last he sighted the end—at last his mind was made up.

To what?

CHAPTER XVI.

AS A FOOT OUT OF JOINT.

"WHERE is Mr. Fowke, Tapp?" inquired the minister, as he neared the farmyard, wherein that worthy man and his heir were at work with two spades and a wheelbarrow— "is he on the premises?" elaborating a wintry smile.

"Dunno, I'm sure, sir," replied John, pushing back his hat and resting his hand on his hip; "'ave you seed the maister anyweers about, Tom?"

"Ees," answered Tom, "I seed un, well, mebbe five minutes ago, a walkin' tords the apple 'ouse."

"Oh," said John, "then I dessay 'e do be theer now. But," as Acts moved off, and with a certain wistfulness, like the "but" of a

child who has a preference and is too shy to tell it, "if I moight make so bold, sir," touching his forehead with a thick forefinger, "I should loike jest a word with ye. I wun't keep 'ee long."

"As long as you please," smiled Mr. Latchet.

To look at him, you would have thought his sole and crowning desire, the very dearest wish he possessed, was to counsel and warn, and generally entreat fraternally, all witless and uncultivated persons throughout the known world. Emboldened by his affability, John abandoned his spade, bade Tom mind what "'e weer a-doin' of," and, his eyes bent upon the ground, sidled through the gate out into the road.

They walked a little way towards the house.

"You have something to tell me?" adventured Acts, finding that he must make the first move.

"Well, yes, sir," answered John, coming to a halt, and wiping his tanned forehead with a red cotton pocket-handkerchief, garnished at the four corners by medallion portraits

of John Wesley, the Duke of Wellington, Lord Byron, and Angelo the swordsman, the which he took from the interior of his hat; "I knows that oi'm a takin' of a liberty—a vast liberty, to come stright at things; but passons, they say, do onderstand more nor other folk; likewise, they 'as a way with 'em, which—which——" but at this point reason faltered. John rolled his handkerchief first into the semblance of an orange, then of a lemon, then squeezed it flat between his two palms, and finally restored it to its original abiding place. He had looked to it for assistance, and it had only served to augment his sufferings.

He felt himself an injured person.

Acts smiled again; he had seen men—men who knew the Greek alphabet by heart, and could decline *Musa*—undergo similar experiences.

"I see," said he, graciously, "you wish for my advice?"

"Thet's it, sir," burst forth John, a joyous smile irradiating his guileless countenance—"thet's it. I wants you just to put in a good word fur I, jest to try ef you can't set matters

right a bit, fur oi'm sure I bean't to blaam. Theer's never been no one served faithfuller——"

"What!" exclaimed Acts, "you don't mean to say that you and the master have come to loggerheads?"

"But I do," replied John weightily, "and fur as little reason as theer is in this theer boot," holding up an unornamental specimen of the style of footgear patronized by male rustics at the commencement of the present century, "You see, sir," he pursued, after a brief pause—(Acts awaited details)—"my girl Patty, she've got what grandfayther used to call 'a kick in 'er gallop,'" chuckling appreciatively, "and ef you chances to cross 'er all them times, I mean when she's uppish, she'd fly at ye as ef she'd tear your very eyes out; but lor! et don't mean nothin'; next minute she's fit to lick yer shoes—that is ef she loikes 'ee nat'rally. But the maister, 'e don't know that I s'pose, though I'm sure 'e's seed enough of 'èr; but theer, maisters 'as theer own ways o' judgin' things; you marn't deal by them es you 'ould by brothers and sisters, and faythers and mothers, and commoner sort o' folks."

"Excuse me one moment," interposed Acts, smilingly, "but I don't seem quite to understand. Am I to infer that Martha and Mr. Fowke have had a quarrel?"

"Ay, sir!"

Mr Latchet looked grave.

"I am sorry to hear that," said he at length; "but what occasioned the rupture? I always have looked on you as the primest of prime favourites."

John shook his head.

"I dunno nothin' 'bout that, sir?" he answered stolidly; "I've tried to do my duty, man and boy, and I've bringed up my childern to do the saam. Whether we've been better loiked on that account's past me to tell, nor do et much matter; fur ef you, bein' poor and little thowt of, live so as you'll not be afeard to die, what men do say of ye won't trouble ye much, I reckon. But you weer askin' 'ow it 'appened."

"Yes."

"Well, 'tweer loike this, then. Patty, she won't believe as Miss Phenie do be ill—they be sech friends, ye know—leastways," deprecatorily, and with the air of one who feels

that he has outstripped discretion, "not so ill as is reported."

"Why ?"

"Well," said John, "I can't zactly say woy, but she don't; and t'other day, when she weer over to Shobdon, she got tellin' the maister as much—leastways, speakin' as she oughtn't, I s'pose; and the long and the short o' it is"—with forced hardihood—"that we've got notice to quit—quit next Saturday !"

A digestive silence.

"But," observed Acts, at length, "I fancied you held a lease."

"So I did," replied John; "but that ren out on New Year's Day, and it en't been re-nooed. The maister's a reer one at choosin' of 'is oppertoonity," with a dry laugh.

"H'm!" smiled the minister; "and what part do you wish me to take in the matter ?"

For a moment or two John held his peace. Then he said, picking a bit of frosted moss from off the wall, and dealing therewith as will silly girls by the big daisies we call "Marguerites :" "I thowt that mebbe, ef you saw no objection, and could afford"—with meaningful emphasis—"to speak, you might

jest put it to 'im whether it weer zackly fair, lookin' at it not altogether as a maister, to—to——"

"In fact," smiled Acts, coolly, "interfere on your behalf?"

"Well, yes, sir."

Another pause.

"Ye see," pursued John, his anxious eyes bent on his spiritual pastor's averted countenance, "'tis so sudden. I dunno weer to go nor yet what to do. Theer's Bray's cottage on the common, tibi shoore; but——"

"Yes," pondered Mr. Latchet, "the position is a trying one, distinctly so—that I recognize at once. Nevertheless," leaning on his stick and adopting the tone of a judge rather than an advocate, "I doubt whether I ought to meddle, whether, indeed, I should be justified in assuming that my voice would carry weight either on one side or the other."

"But maister thinks a deal of your 'pinion!"

Acts smiled.

"See 'ow 'e forgived young Kempson takin' thet rail, when you speaked up for 'e."

"Ah, but then he had no personal feeling

against Kempson—I mean he was not directly on bad terms with him."

"Neither 'as 'e any cause to be on bad terms wi' we," decidedly.

"That may be; still"—with a suave smile —"I am afraid——"

John tossed the bit of moss over the wall.

"Very good, sir," he exclaimed; "say no more—I onderstands. But I'se sorry to 'ave troubled ye. Dang me!"—in a louder tone, and with a dash of passion—"but I'se sorry to 'ave troubled ye! And thet's your religion! thet's your charity!"

"I do not know what you mean," was the icy rejoinder; "if you suppose that I have been blind to the determined and open neglect of my teaching, and covert dislike of me as an individual, shown by you and your daughter ever since I undertook the care of this parish, or that I am able or willing to forget that same at a moment's notice, you are very much mistaken. I do not profess to be dead to every human emotion."

"Ha!" smiled John, "thet's well; passons do be expected to be moderate," and turned himself about with fine carelessness.

Acts compressed his lips.

He disliked the Tapps, old and young, and he felt glad—yes, glad, Christian minister as he was, and follower of Him who once upon a time told a man called Peter that if his brother sinned against him he was to be forgiven his sin, not once, nor twice, nor thrice, but seventy times seven—that they had fallen on ill days. Nevertheless, he knew the force of class sympathies, the rapid growth of party feeling; this dull old crab of a clodhopper had his supporters, his staunch backers, as well as his superiors.

"You know," remarked he, Mr. Latchet, as John clumped off, "I do not wish to seem unfeeling. I only mean——"

"Sir," said John, facing round, his freckled face aglow with honest indignation, his rust-coloured eyes bright with liveliest scorn, "ef you weer willin' to say the soundingest words you could string together—ef you'd preach a 'ole sermon in my favour, I'd not 'ave it. I've got a Friend," with a great smile, "such a Friend as man ne'er was nor e'er could be, and that Friend lives theer," pointing up at the unclouded heaven, "and in 'im I puts my trust."

Then he went back to the wheelbarrow.

Eyebrows lifted, his face expressive of cool amusement mixed with some wonder, as though in his mind he said, "Dear me, how droll!" Mr. Latchet made his way to the apple-house, a low thatched building, little better than a shed, only four-walled, which stood in the kitchen garden and was used, as its name denoted, for the storing of fruit for winter use. He had often been there before, sometimes with Aunt Rachel, to pick out a few baking pears or a dozen or two Ribstone pippins, or big yellow codlins, when the year grew old and Mrs. Forbes' *ménûes* began to exhibit a certain absence of variety; and once with Tryphena to remark on the personal beauty and be ravished by the maternal fondness of a stray black-and-white cat, who with seven kittens had established herself on an empty sack in one of its corners; so this present visit occasioned him no sense of strangeness.

Gently he knocked at the worm-eaten door.

But no one answered, neither was any sound audible.

He knocked again.

A crackling noise as of paper thrust hastily into a pocket, and Mr. Fowke obeyed the summons.

"Well," said he, "and what the——Oh, it's you, is it?" in a slightly modified tone, recognizing his not-to-be-evaded visitor!

"Yes," replied that gentleman; "can I speak to you for a moment, in private?"

"You can come in here if you like," was the gruff answer.

Lowering his head, Acts stepped athwart the threshold. Jacob pushed the door to with his foot.

"I suppose," observed he, when it was quite shut, "that you know what's up?"

"Yes," replied Acts; "Sprague told me yesterday, and we met this morning!"

"What! in Coatham?"

"No, as I was coming here."

Jacob stared gloomily at a heap of straw thrown down on the floor after the apples it had made a bed for had been rummaged out.

"The man's a purse-proud jackanapes!" enounced Acts, after a while; "the world is scarce big enough to hold him!"

"To hold him and you, you mean," commented Mr. Fowke, caustically.

"Yes," smiled Acts, "and you too. I tell you," with increased energy, "something must be done, and done at once!"

"But what?"

Mr. Latchet thought.

"Can't you send the girl away somewhere?" said he at length—"somewhere where I could meet her, and—and—let it be got over," with a rush.

Jacob opened his mouth and protruded his lower jaw. This was a trick of his when startled—or as nearly startled as one of his slow, unimpressionable nature could well be. You may have seen a too heavily-bitted horse do the same.

"You're for taking the bull by the horns!" observed he, describing a half-circle with the toe of his right boot on the dusty floor.

"Yes," replied Acts, "I am."

Silence.

"Well!" exclaimed the minister, when some moments had elapsed, "have you nothing to say? Are you stricken dumb by the extent of my audacity?" with a low, bitter laugh.

"Nay," replied Mr. Fowke, "I'm not easy scared; but I don't know"—dully—"I don't seem much to mind what happens, either one way or t'other. After all, it'll come to the same thing in the end."

What do you mean?"

Jacob laughed his old grating, scornful laugh.

"That's a stout beam," remarked he, presently, looking up at the knotted rafter which ran through the building.

"Yes," said Acts lifting his eyebrows.

"It would take a good bit to bring it down?"

"I dare say."

"You might hang a man to it, and 'twouldn't shift—a man of your weight even. Ay! 'tis a fine bit of elm. I recollect my father got it off a tree that was struck by lightning, and the same flash killed our shepherd, who'd taken refuge under it—killed him, and plastered the skin of his face on to the trunk just like a mask. Queer—eh?"

"Very," said Acts, drawing nearer to the door; "but I do not quite see—I dare say it's my stupidity—what all this has to do with the subject we have in hand."

Jacob smiled.

"No," replied he, "more do I; but when friends get talking—friends like you and I, you know," with an evil grin—"things are apt to slip out unawares;" fingering something in his pocket.

The minister's eyes fastened thereon with ill-concealed anxiety. The man's manner struck him as abnormally eccentric. He would have given his "Don Juan" to be at the sign-post and clean out of his reach; nevertheless, he could not bring himself to put an end to the interview without having arrived at some definite plan of action.

"Yes," he replied, "that is true; still, we ought to come to an understanding. I should like to know how you intend to deal with this fresh difficulty?"

"I don't intend!"

"But that is absurd—we cannot, in the face of fact, take up such a position as that; remember——"

"I tell you," said Jacob doggedly, "I don't care two straws. Why should I? no man dies twice—no! not the biggest villain ever——"

"But," cried Acts, "you're not dead—you're alive, alive and liable to be—to be—well, I've no wish to hurt your feelings, but really——"

Jacob stiffened.

"Come," said he, frigidly, "I've had about as much of this as I've stomach for. You'd best be going."

"I believe," exclaimed Acts, desperately, smiting his clenched fists together—"I believe that you're going to knuckle down to the fellow after all—that you mean to fling me over at the eleventh hour; but mind"—shaking his forefinger threateningly—"you do so, and on goes the halter. You can be very funny about our being friends, you shall see what a friend I can be if you play me false."

"Pooh!" scoffed Jacob, and turned away to pick up a pea which had rolled out of a small sack which stood against the wall. John would begin cropping to-morrow.

"Well," remarked he, finding that the minister still stood his ground, "do you mean to stick there all day? because if you do"—laughing bitterly, "I'd better get a Bible, or a——"

Acts looked at him: his mirth ceased. The

furious resentment expressed by that glance might well have checked the levity of an idiot.

In silence they parted.

Alone, Mr. Fowke took a letter from his pocket—that pocket the contents of which had occasioned a certain quick-witted gentleman so deep uneasiness—eyed it, bit his lip, and put it back again.

"Lost!" muttered he to himself, plucking at his short black whiskers—"lost! Why should I care? Body and soul and great God of me—why *should* I care?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CORN IS RED THAT WAS GREEN.

TRAMP, tramp, went Robert along the frozen footpath, between the short whitened grasses and scolloped-out dandelion leaves and daisy tufts. For the sight of the stile—that stile over which Acts beheld him vault—had suddenly recalled Martha to his mind, and with Martha, Martha's words.

"She said that I should meet her if I went back this way," thought he, dusting his gloved hands—the top rung was gritty—and strode on fast. What would happen if they did meet, however, was quite beyond his powers of discernment.

"She certainly seemed anxious to see me," he pondered, "and spoke as though she knew

of something which might change the face of things; but women reason so loosely, their opinions are as rootless as duckweed. Still, it will be a comfort to have some one to speak to, and she is a good creature, that is certain."

Yet an hour ago he had laughed out loud at the "good creature," for a hysterical marvel-monger and seeker of mares' nests, whose words, like the wares of a Florentine shop-keeper, must be appraised at about one quarter of their nominal value, and concerning whose beliefs or infidelities no sensible person would trouble himself for one moment. Oh! most serene and elevated and rational sceptic.

But this is scarcely the fittest time to make fun of you, my Enthusiast, my Pioneer, marching, axe-armed,

"So impatient, full of action,
Full of manly pride and friendship."

A little later, perhaps, when the curtain has been rung down and the strife is ended and you have regained your native wastes, with maybe a crape band about your hat and more memories than you can well find room for, and the reputation of being a dismal failure your

lifelong possession, we may uncork our wit, effervescent, exhilarating as the finest vintage of bright France, convert you into a platform for our choicest pleasantries, adorn your name with our darkest sayings; indeed there is no telling how lavish and handsome and amusing we may be when—when your back is turned, my good sir, and we feel ourselves again.

Midway through the fir plantation—still green after a fashion, likewise full of the delicate smell common to all such companies, likewise strewed brownly with dead branches, fringed with dry teeth of leaves, and fretted cones, choice winter resorts of divers small peoples—midway through this haunt of quietness Robert did loathly perceive his spirits, such as they were, to be on the wane. Hitherto he had been too angry, too much occupied with his own grievances to feel either distress or alarm in any very marked degree. That he had been insulted ranked first of catastrophes; that his happiness was at stake chiefest of horrors.

Now, however, as he walked on and on and no bonnet made its appearance—in itself a sufficiently oppressive circumstance, seeing

that it was to Martha, and Martha alone, that he, at this juncture, must look for advice and assistance—matters, his wrath having cooled, somewhat, assumed quite a different hue.

He paused aghast at the magnitude of his selfishness — his folly, in supposing that a woman could possibly form a resolution over night and adhere thereto the next morning. Why did he not walk on to John's cottage at once—clutch time by the forelock ? Simpleton that he was—vain—

When (he had reached the stile) whom should he see coming through the opposite gate—the gate leading to Hangman's ditch—but Miss Tapp herself.

A trice and he was over those three gnarled logs—the dread and aversion of every "she" in the neighbourhood—and scampering towards that very roundabout and unfashionable-looking female,—who in her turn performed a wild salute with her umbrella,—in as hot haste as though she were—well, a young woman whom you might liken to Mereglens on fine April evenings, and the smell of primroses, and violet stains on library floors, and pink geraniums, without endangering your personal

liberty—about whom, in fact, it was a legitimate form of recreation to talk exactly as much nonsense as you fancied.

"Ah!" exclaimed this esteemed person, when they stood face to face, "I thowt that we should meet; and I 'ope ye've got good news, sir?"

"No," replied he, "that I haven't. It was just as you said it would be. He shut the door in my face."

"He!" echoed Martha—"you didn't see Miss Rachel, then?"

"No; I met Isaac at the top of the lane, and he told me that he had just left a letter for Mr. Fowke—given it to him, himself, you know."

"Ay!"—with a slow smile—"'e've got mighty spry 'bout letters lately."

"So I hurried on, and at the farm-yard gate I found him reading this same document. He didn't hear me coming at first, but then he looked up, and turned rather white, and walked off to the house."

"But didn't you run after 'im?"

"I called."

"Yes, and——"

"He burst out laughing."

"The beast!" hissed Martha—"the great, vulgar, onmannerly beast! Why, clown as I am, I'd be ashamed to act so by any one, let alone a gentleman 'oo——but"—breaking off with that suddenness which some persons vowed detracted from the value of her remarks, and abrogated the charms of social intercourse—"you see 'e weer afeard to face 'ee."

"Yes," said Robert, "I suppose that was at the bottom of it."

"Theer's no doubt but it was. 'Tis just as I spected," and her tone was not altogether that of lamentation, "and you seed nothin' o' Miss Rachel?"

"No. But I met the man Latchet," stabbing the life out of a hapless buttercup plant.

"Eh!" exclaimed Martha, "you met the minister?"

"Yes, and cut him dead!" with slow pleasureful emphasis; "not that that will hurt him much though," after a brief pause, "he must be pretty well accustomed to that sort of thing by this time, if his previous life has been on a par with his present."

Martha stood silent, her eyes bent on the ground.

"I'll be bound," said she at length, "that 'e's 'eerd of your bein' at Coatham. Dr. Sprague met I jest as I left the Garge yesterday arternoon, and says 'e—a smilin' and cockin' 'is 'ead—'Es it true as Mr. Valoynes es back among us?' or somethin' like that—'e do blow and snuffle so there's no gettin' 'old o' one word in ten; and I ses 'I dunno;' and then 'e says, 'Cause, a friend o' mine, seed 'im go into the Garge;' and I ses, ''Deed,' quite cool—'tain't my way to empty my 'ead to fill other people's—and then I walked on, but I dessay 'e set the ball rollin'."

"Besides," observed Robert, "I saw him speaking to Latchet at the corner of Friar Street, just a minute after he left you. I watched them out of my window."

"Nay," said Martha, "thet's it, then. Lord, 'tis a world thet we do live in, and no mistake."

Robert smiled.

"Well," remarked he, at length, converting his stick into a backboard, "and now for a plan of action. What had I better do, do

you think, to defeat these worthies? I must lose no time."

Martha pinched up her lips.

For a while she remained mute; then she exclaimed, troublously, her eyes away among the straight, ruddy stems of the still firs:

"I do wish it 'adn't come to this, I do."

"How do you mean?" questioned Robert.

"Well, sir," said she, in that desperate sort of tone which had become so familiar to her lips of late, "you see I can't forget everything all of a moment. I can't be a ooman without bein' in someways a child too, and we was so happy, she and me a playin' summers through. Why, I've sat wi' 'er in my lap, 'ole arter-noons under thet very tree, she a-chattin' to 'erself and singin' 'er little songs—they talk a deal of potes, but I know ef she weer *put* to it, ye know, she'd make a sight finer potery nor 'alf them 'oo does—I've sat wi' 'er in my lap under thet tree, ay, scores o' times; in 'er 'and, mebbe, a few bluebells, or cowslips, or ragg'd robins—she weer allays so set on flowers—and 'er 'ead laid 'pon my shoulder—— Oh, sir, do, please, not look at me," and Martha broke down utterly.

Robert stared at his boots.

"It's monstrous hard!" said he.

"And," said Martha, wiping her eyes, "ef you feels it so, what must I—I, 'oo've growed up, child and gal, as you may say, within their shadder. Why, sir, a year agone ef you'd comed to me and said 'Patty'—leastways I don't mean Patty, 'cause thet's not your way o' speakin'—but 'Martha, shall the maister be beggared or you burnt?' I'd 'a' said 'me burnt,' ay, and meant it too, and walked into the fire as cheerful as though I weer bein' married; for the maister 'as allays been Miss Phenie, and Miss Phenie's been my life, and—theer—I am again; oh, dear, but I could knock my 'ead off!"

"Why?" demanded Robert, "since when has it become disgraceful to give way to natural and pure emotion? I tell you, Martha, I like you second best of all women in the world; and why? because you *are* a woman and have a woman's heart—as women's hearts would be if only we men were content to follow a little less closely on the heels of that Archman, the devil!"

"Nay," smiled Martha, heaving a little sigh

—she did not mind hearing that he saw good in her—" nay, but I don't think thet's just at all, for a man's been dear to me as my own soul, and I'm sure I'm no friend to Satan. Besides, ain't you a man yourself? But we marn't bide 'ere a chiffettin'; I must begin my story," and moved on a step or two.

" Your story," echoed Robert—" what story?"

" You shall 'ear when we gets to the tree. 'Twill make it plainer, I think, ef I do p'int things out as we goes along!"

Quickly they walked towards the wood.

" Theer now," said she, when they stood under the twisted heaven-seeking boughs of the vast old oak, " 'tweer theer," pointing with her umbrella to a thick tuft of grass, " just theer!"

" But what," asked Robert, frowning wonderingly—" what was there?"

" Well, I couldn't see zackly, for 'tweer gettin' dusk. But I'd best make a clean breast on't, as faything says. Poor fayther! 'e do look so str'ight," mournfully, " well!" brisking up again, " I dessay you'll think I'm tellin' lies, but I'll give you my word 'tis Gospel truth. One afternoon last October I

weer in this wood a gettin' a few cones fur firin'—they burns very bright, ye know, sir, and we wasn't very well off just then, through Tom bein' at 'ome, 'avin' cut 'is thumb wi' a bill 'ook, just across the ball, theer," turning up a chapped specimen—"so I weer glad to make out as best I could; and as I weer standin' down theer by the yew (you ain't noticed that, 'tis 'alf in the ditch and thick, so that no one can see round it), 'oo should come by but maister. 'Well,' thinks I, 'I won't say nowt, 'cause you can't well reckon on the fit 'e's in; mebbe 'e'd call me a thief'—my apern weer full—so I kept still, intendin' to be gone when 'e weer. But you may guess my feelin's when I found thet 'e weer goin' no further than the next field, this field weer you and I do now stand, and thet 'e weer going to work theer, fur presently I 'eard the noise of a pick, sech as I'd seed in 'is 'and as 'e went by. 'Well,' I thought, 'I I must jest put a bold face on it, pr'aps 'e won't 'ear me arter all,' and I picked up my petticoats fur to make a start. But at thet very moment somebody else came along the path. This time 'tweer the minister; 'e stepped very

light, and Mr. Fowke seemed to take no notice. But no sooner 'ad 'e, Latchet, got over the stile, than t'other—the maister I mean—give a great shout as ef 'e weer quite skeared; and then theer weer a vast noise o' talkin', and I could 'ear that the minister weer desperate bounceable. Now 'e and I 'ad never been over friendly—I'd my reasons; also, I didn't fancy the way 'e eyed Miss Phenie—so I jest made bold to creep up and 'ear what they—oh, Lord, what's thet?" as a thrush flew out of the hedge.

"Nothing," said Robert; "only a bird."

Martha breathed hard.

"I be that upset," said she, wiping her face with her apron, "thet I'm ready to jump out o' my skin. Weer was I?"

"Behind the yew, listening to two ruffians."

"Ay! Well, I stood by a bit crouched down so that they shouldn't see me, and I 'eerd the minister say, 'I've caught you at last; I've got your life in the palm o' my 'and, under the sole o' my right foot;' and then he laughed a bit—'ow often 'ave I said those words over to myself since, and wondered what 'e could a' meant by 'em—and then the maister bade

him 'old, or 'e'd knock 'is brains out, but Latchet—'e only laughed again; and then I went down on my 'ands and knees, and weer jest takin' a squint through the 'edge for I weer all of a itch wi' curiosity like, when the fringe o' my shawl caught on a twig, and——"

"And you saw nothing, after all?" with grim promptitude.

Robert was in one of those pleasing moods when a man assumes the worst as a matter of course.

Martha smiled.

"Didn't I?" said she.

"But what?"

"Well, for one thing, theer weer a pair o' pistols—them big uns that fits into Peter's saddle."

"No!" exclaimed Robert.

"That theer weer then, and summat black, and—for thet lay quite close to me, so thet I could see it as plain as I can see you—a pocket-book—a great leathern pocket-book, with a bright catch"—(Robert's face reddened to his hat)—"and 'e'd dug a 'ole in the bank, just as though he meant to bury 'em one and all; but I'd not much time for spyin', fur 'e'd

'eerd that twig snap, and bawled out so, thet I weer on'y too glad to get off without bein' caught; but it weer rum now, wern't it?"

Robert gazed up at that thrush, who, now perched on a branch to his right—a round, full-bodied branch, which, maybe, was of the thickness of my second finger, when gipsy-faced Rowley nodded drowsily in his green fortalice—was now engaged in making herself beautiful with fine hennish earnestness.

"Truly," said he, and you could not have told from his tone if he knew whereof he spake.

Martha's façe fell. For a moment or two she stood, her eyes downcast, a pout on her lips, as though she were in two minds as to whether she would not just toss her head and bid him "good-morning" without more ado. Then she walked towards the bank.

"'Twas about theer," said she, somewhat frigidly, pointing to a spot where the moss and coarse grass and little feathery hedgerow growths took a tinge of brown, "thet 'e'd dug the 'ole. Course I can't say whether anything weer put into it or no. The minister might 'ave just slipped it all into 'is pocket—'e spoke quite bold enough."

"Ah!" said Robert, abandoning his ornithological studies, "but the hole was dug there?"

"As near as I can remember."

Without another word he went down on his knees, pulled off his gloves, and rooting out the aforesaid weeds with his big strong white hands, scraped away a little heap of mould, the which rattling down, broke the thin ice in the ditch below—that ditch into which Jacob had stepped backwards whilst assuring Acts that he had taken him for "Old Nick."

"Ye'll 'ev to dig deeper nor that, sir," said Martha, "Remember, 'e'd got a pick; 'ere, let I come," and down she popped on her knees by the side of him and grubbed away as though within an inch of a fortune. "I'm afeard," said she, when they had turned up some six pounds or so of dark, sweet-breathed earth—what smell goodlier than that given forth by a newly-turned spadeful, a moist bank in spring?—"I'm afeard thet it's labour lost."

"Don't say that!" exclaimed Robert; "I felt something then—yes," scraping and

scratching quite furiously, "something hard. Come out, will you? There," wrenching forth a long nondescript object, caked in dirt, and garnished at the lesser end by a writhing worm—"there!" with a dry laugh.

"My gracious!" said Martha, and redoubled her exertions.

One by one they all came to light; brace of pistols, little bit of black rag pierced with five holes—corresponding oddly with the position of a man's eyes and nostrils and mouth—and leathern purse.

Robert fell back on his heels as he laid hold of this, also his face, flushed by labour and expectation, turned very white.

"Her father!" he murmured, letting it fall out of his hand among the grass—"her father!"

"Et's never yourn?" exclaimed Martha, paling too.

"Yes, it is," said he, "it is the purse I stuffed full of tissue paper at Lyme, lest I should be robbed between there and Axminster, because the landlord at the inn told me that highway robberies were frequent on the road I should have to take. Oh, for some air,"

flinging back his head, "I feel as if I must suffocate!"

Martha glowered like one cataleptic.

"But then," said she at length, "maister must 'a been the 'ighwayman?" and fixed her eyes on Robert in solemnest perplexity.

Robert kept silence.

For a while they remained so. Martha was the first, womanlike, to regain something like self-possession.

"'Tis very dreadful," said she, scrambling to her feet—"dreadful because o' Miss Phenie; but I don't know that I'm altogether so taken back"—she was, though—"'cause I've 'eerd so many queer things said about 'im, and I dunno, 'e's got such a strange way. I've often said to faything, 'ef maister wasn't maister, et's you should meet him in a dark lane sooner nor I.'"

Robert sighed.

"But the man doesn't want for money?" he rejoined.

"Theer's them," replied Martha, "as 'ud want in 'eaven."

Mr. Valoynes got off his knees, and looked down at a green stain on the skirt of his brown coat.

"I hate to touch the things," said he, moodily; "but I suppose I must."

"You'll take them away with you?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Why, in course you will, and go to a magistrate, and make your statement, and get a warrant to arrest the rascal."

Martha was rather proud, between you and I, of the familiarity with legal procedure betrayed in this admonition.

Robert stood silent.

"Why, you don't mean to say," cried she, quite indignantly, "that you're going to let 'im off?"

"I don't mean to say anything. I must think."

Martha cleaned the palms of her hands with a mallow frond.

"I'll tell you what," said she at length, "a wise 'ead makes a still tongue. I'd best 'ave let well alone."

"Why?" smiled Robert, filling his great-coat pockets, and looking amused despite his trouble.

"Because you don't care—because you're just as cool and——

"Do you think Tryphena would like her father to be hung?"

To that our grumbler could say nothing.

"You may be sure," he went on, "that I shall do my best; but I am not omnipotent—I cannot control the course of events!"

And then he, with a great hand-squeeze, took his departure—strode over the grass away to Coatham to do his best—this young man who was not omnipotent, who could not control the course of events.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WITH OFFERING AND BLOOD SACRIFICE OF TEARS.

"WELL," said Mr. Fowke, turning himself about on his chair, in his right hand a table-knife tipped with a bit of mouldy cheese, which flavourable morsel he was in the act of conveying to his mouth, "don't thee want thy supper?"

The person he addressed was Aunt Rachel, the time eight p.m., before him spread the usual concomitants of his evening meal—to wit, a piece of rusty bacon, ditto of tough pale cheese, a big brown loaf, and an equally big, likewise brown, cider jug. He would seem to have just sat down.

"No," she answered, throwing her needle, which had just snapped in half—she was, as usual, at work by the small round table, at

work on a new black stuff apron—into the fire, and searching for another.

"How's that?"

She remained silent.

"How's that?" he reiterated.

"There are those who want supper more than I do."

He laughed, and emptied his mug, then ate what cheese he had upon his plate and helped himself to more.

"Thou'rt a fool!" smiled he, dispassionately, after a bit.

"Never mind. You give me that key."

"What key?"

"That key."

He shook his head, assuming an expression of stolid ignorance.

"Very well," said Aunt Rachel, in that cold, hard, ugly tone, common to most women when much exasperated; "then to-morrow I'll make Tapp break open the door. Not another night do I pass in this house, with things like this."

"That," said Jacob, coolly, "may be truer nor thou'st any inkling of!" and grinned wickedly, as if he greatly relished his own cleverness.

There ensued an oppressive silence.

Appetite appeased, Mr. Fowke pushed back his chair, rose to his feet, carved a great hunch of bread, the which he slipped into one of his coat pockets, and made for the door.

"Where are you going?" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, letting her work fall on her lap, and looking up at him with eyes made great of dread.

He paid no more heed than might one born deaf.

"No," cried she, jumping up from her seat, and running out after him into the hall, "you shall not! Jacob!" clutching at his sleeve.

"Let be!" he growled.

"But 'tis not right to treat any creature so. For God's sake——"

"You want me to forgive her, don't you?" inquired he, smilingly; "you want to have her downstairs again to run on your errands, and do your dirty work, and——"

"I don't want her to be driven crazy."

"Then," said he, "let be!" and therewith strode off up the broad dark stairs, in his hands the candle he had taken from the supper table.

White faced, her teeth set into her under lip, her heart thumping as it had not since one Sunday evening, when, as you may remember, she having, in the presence of a slim young hunter's moon, just parted from a man called Acts Latchet, paused, hands clasped, unknowing whether to laugh or cry,—Miss Fowke stood and listened.

So she stood last night and the night before, and the night before that—stood, not an adult female, but a pair of ears, hearing her single sense.

At first all was still, save for divers ghostly cracks and creaks of aged beams, as the master lumbered on. Then the cry of a seldom opened door, like to the sudden revulsion of feeling produced by encountering strangers on the mind of one fond of solitude, smote the chill air, and then another cry, human, treble, most pitiful. Aunt Rachel's large-knuckled fingers clipped those ample banisters—clipped them tight, as might one dying, chance of life.

One, two, three, four, five minutes, three hundred and fifty seconds—minutes of darkness and suspense, seconds of brain pulsing

and vague fear, and a shrill scream, a shriek.

Up the stairs flew Miss Fowke.

"He may kill us," said she to herself—said, mind you, not muttered, said right out loud so that you could have heard her below had you been standing there—"but it shall be together," and stumbled on past her own room, up a narrow flight of stairs—once she came down on her hands and knees—to the threshold of a room situate under the roof, a room few persons knew the existence of.

The door was ajar, a faint light streamed through the aperture so occasioned, the key was in the lock.

Plucking that forth Aunt Rachel walked boldly in, and saw—

A girl crouched in a corner, clinging to the wall; a man standing glaring at her, his fist clenched; a girl with a pinched white face and great bright eyes, destitute of sense as two big diamonds, and dry scarlet lips, and swart-tangled hair; a man fierce, dangerous.

"You wretch!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, walking up to him, and striking down his hand—"you abominable, atrocious, unnatural

monster! Touch her if you dare!" and planted herself between them, erect as any grenadier. For—it might be a minute—the man eyed her irresolute, then he turned on his heel and fled, not hastily, quite at his leisure—nay, with a certain show of firmness, of knowing why he went; nevertheless he *fled.*

Left to herself—he forgot to take the candle—Aunt Rachel gave vent to a great tremulous sob.

"Oh," cried she, going down on her knees by Tryphena, who gazed at her stupidly as though not knowing who she was or why she had come there, or, indeed anything about her (I think that hurt worst of all), "my dear—my dear!" and took her in her arms and wept over her, and rocked herself to and fro, and sobbed and moaned and wailed so that I do not like to write of it. One has troubles enough of one's own in this world without going out of one's way to make fresh ones.

Well, there they sat, it may have been one hour, it may have been half a dozen—you could not hear the clock strike up in this spider's palace, this cobwebby, fusty, rat-eaten refuge of flue and mildew, wherein a small

frightened creature had bode all but seven nights and days, had known hunger and thirst, and mad lust for liberty, and racking pains, and loss of sense—O happy loss, (there are strange things done even now in the dark corners of this best possible world of ours)—there they sat, I say, I cannot well tell how long, the girl's head on Miss Fowke's shoulder, her slight fever-ruled body gathered up in the woman's strong lean arms, now and then a big tear dropped on her roughened hair, midst kisses—kisses that stung the lips that gave them.

For like Martha, Aunt Rachel, her affections fairly roused, was of the fiery order of lovers. Did she love you, she loved you desperately, knowing no limit, neither possibility of withholding.

And now, as she saw with her eyes and heard with her ears—did not Tryphena babble sickly as she lay, babble of Martha, and Robert, and letters, and his locket (she had it round her neck, be sure) of glad days and sad, of little things long forgot, little poisonous, sharp-toothed things which, as they met the mind,

pricked,—how vast evil had been wrought by her readiness to gratify, no matter at whose expense, that fierce mind-hunger, provoked by grief, she sorrowed, ay, mightily. God grant that ne'er you nor I shall ever sorrow so!

There was a day, well dight of days—a day of gorgeous golds and reds—when the great sun, like to a sweet king, laughed all day long, and wreathed maids' lips in smiles, and Jacob, tired with harvest toil, having come home and found his dinner unprepared, had, to speak plain English, been very cross; whereupon high words ensued, and much unhappiness. And Aunt Rachel, sitting down when he had gone, had fallen a weeping, for she was tired too; and as she sat, head on hand, wishing dully that she might soon be dead, a little blue-eyed girl had come to her and, putting her arms about her neck, had said, "Auntie, do you not cry, for Phenie feels for you," and kissed her tenderly, that little girl, upon the mouth, her head just reaching thereunto—and she had beaten the child lustily scarce two hours ago.

I tell you as Miss Fowke thought of that, making the darkness light, winter summer,

such a wave of tenderness swept through her mind that it seemed as though she could never be again as she had been, but must be new and gentle and quite otherwise.

"My child," whispered she, pressing her trembling lips to Phenie's fiery brow, "God pardon me!"

So they sat.

About eleven—Aunt Rachel, who was of too keen a nature ever to quite lose sight of fact, fancied that three hours must have elapsed since she obtained the mastery—about eleven, Tryphena having awakened from the torpor into which she had fallen on finding herself in sheltering arms and the presence of a friend, and murmured hoarsely, "I want something to drink," she, Miss Fowke, arose and felt her way downstairs to procure a tumbler and some water, likewise food, if fate should favour her. Daily bread had been somewhat scarce with some one of late.

Down, down, down crept she. At length her foot touched the mat at the bottom of the stairs. She stole on through the hall. As she neared the kitchen, an odd noise, as of a person choking, struck on her ears. She

pushed open the door, which was half closed, and looked in.

There sat Jacob, his arms flung out on the table, his head resting thereon, crying—yes, crying terribly. On the floor by his side a crumpled letter.

"Goodness!" ejaculated Aunt Rachel.

Slowly he raised his head; blearedly he stared at her.

"It's all lost," said he—"every farthing;" and fell a-sobbing again.

"What's lost?" said she, turning very pale.

"And I've been such a brute to her!" he went on, catching his breath, "and she just like a lamb. Oh, Lord—oh, Lord!"

"There's no need to take God's name in vain," was the grave rejoinder; "if you've done wrong, tell it. 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to——'"

"The dust that he was made of," exclaimed Jacob, pushing back his chair, and rising to his feet, and then took his candle and marched off upstairs without another word.

Leaving the letter on the floor.

"My dear sir," read Aunt Rachel—it was

not without compunction that she picked it up, but she did—"it is with the most heartfelt sorrow that I now pen these words. Captain Piper of the Seahawk, bound from Madeira to Plymouth, arrived in this harbour this morning. He immediately on landing called on me, and laid before me the following disastrous intelligence. On the tenth of December, his mate, P. Edwards, being on the look-out, sighted a water-logged vessed to N.W. On signalling it, a distress signal was run up, and presently the Seahawk, being put about, they descried two men who immediately gave tokens that they were in want of assistance. A boat was put off, and they were brought on board in a very exhausted condition. They subsequently stated that the wrecked vessel, which settled within half an hour of their deliverance, was a trading barque of fifty tons register, called the Good Hope, and bound from Bridport to the coast of Guinea, also that a mutiny had broken out among the crew—twenty-three in number—of whom they were the sole survivors, and the captain and first mate had been murdered, and their bodies thrown overboard about ten knots off Cape

Finisterre, when they were overtaken by a fearful gale which carried away their masts, washed overboard and drowned the rest of the crew, and left them in the wretched state described by Captain Piper. This is a most grievous calamity—and——"

And Aunt Rachel's eyes failed her.

She stood as one mesmerized.

CHAPTER XIX.

AND LO, BETWEEN THE NIGHTFALL AND THE LIGHT.

HE shock imparted to her already shaken mind by the perusal of this singular and, at first sight, inexplicable document, got the better of—in so far at least as was consonant with uninterrupted consciousness—Aunt Rachel folded it up, put it away in the cupboard (would that she could put its memory as well!) and busied herself in collecting such things as she thought likely to be wanted upstairs.

The fire was out; she must light it, and there was not so much as a chip left in the wood basket. Throwing on Tryphena's shawl —how that would have stung last night; nay, it had been as much as she could do to let the

poor thing hang unmolested on its nail—she hastened out to the washhouse, where the logs and sticks were kept.

As she undid the door of that slightly chill and malodorous tenement, in the centre of which stood a wonderful old pump of quite affecting simplicity of design, garnished by a stone tablet bearing the date 1658, and further setting forth in bas-relief, and with great naturalness, how Adam and Eve passed their waking hours in Paradise, something white and long and not quite unphantomlike issued from out the gloom and glided by her towards the house. She started aside and turned to look, and exclaimed, "What's that?" being a little off her balance, to tell the truth, and inclined to make much of trifles; but nothing could be seen, so she supposed she had been mistaken, and set to filling her apron with all possible dispatch. Somehow, that washhouse was the unaccountablest old hole; she had always thought so, always, from a child.

Back in the kitchen, and the door re-bolted, action checked, or if not quite that, considerably weakened, thought. After all, if this

miserable ship had gone down, and they were a hundred or two the poorer, there still was plenty ; and with a good house over your head, and four substantial meals a day all the year round, you really could not find much to grumble at.

"It's those unhappy creatures who were drowned that I think of," mused Aunt Rachel, battling with her petticoats and a tray, whereon steamed a basin of gruel and tumbler of port-wine negus ; "besides, I felt certain what would come of it. I knew that he'd burn his fingers sooner or later ; every one does who gets mixed up in those mad kind of ventures. Well, my dear," pushing open the attic door, "and how do you feel now ?"

But Tryphena made no answer.

She was lying full length on the bare boards, her face turned to the wall. She did not find them hard now ; she would, I think, never know hardness more.

Miss Fowke deposited the tray on a lopsided chest of drawers, which, with two window poles, composed the entire furniture of this evil place.

"Phenie !" said she, bending down and

laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, "rouse up and come to your own room. Come and get undressed and go into bed. Yes, do!" entreatingly.

"No!" said the girl, getting closer to the wall, as though it afforded her a sense of security—"no!"

"But you will die; it is quite wrong to be so obstinate."

"I do not care!"

Miss Fowke seemed at her wits' end.

"I have brought you some gruel," said she at length, "and some hot wine and water; won't you have it before it gets cold? It will warm you, and," taking a small numb hand between her own, "you are like a stone!"

"It is," said Tryphena, dreamily, "because of my love for him. I ought to have gone to Africa."

"Gone to Africa!" echoed Aunt Rachel, in blank bewilderment.

"Yes," rejoined the girl, sitting up and pushing back her hair; "'twas father's ship, and the way was plain. Jesus has said so—Jesus, my Jesus. Ah, beautiful Lord!" crossing her hands upon her breast, "cannot you

see Him standing there, so white and royal? Jesus, my beloved!" flinging her arms out wide as though to embrace some one.

"Be quiet!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, "do you want your father to come to you?"

"And He has known sorrow too—sorrow, and want, and pain. He fell beneath His cross. Oh that I had been there to let it crush me to small bits instead! And the people that went by wagged their heads at Him. That must have been the worst of all, do you not think so?" catching hold of a work-coarsened hand—"to hang there agonized, knowing it was for them, and be reviled. Oh!" bursting into tears; "but," with a smile such as may have Stephen given—is not a smile, indeed, a gift? yes, best of gifts—when seeing heaven, "now look at Him. See His clear face, His high, sweet air."

Aunt Rachel bent down and took her in her arms, and stifled the mad words against her bosom.

"I tell you," exclaimed she, "he'll hear."

"Who?" smiled Tryphena, "God hears everything."

Then she seemed to sleep.

"You see," said she, presently, "it has comforted me so. When I was so hungry I thought that I must die, I said 'Lord feed me,' and the pain went off. When I choked for thirst He gave me drink. Oh, but do not think me a hypocrite. He *is* my Saviour; He *has* saved me; without Him I must have perished."

Aunt Rachel shook.

"Oh, child!" moaned she.

Then again there was a lull.

"Aunt Rachel," said Phenie, at length, "do you really love me? You are very good; but do you love me—*love*, you know?" looking up in her face questioningly.

"Yes," replied Aunt Rachel, "I do; I love you dearly."

"Then how came you to let father put me here?"

Silence.

"Never mind," pursued the girl, resting on her elbow, and heaving a little sigh, "I will have some wine and water, if you will give it me in a spoon. I could not hold a glass."

So she had three tea-spoonfuls.

"There," said she, "and now I can go to

sleep. No, I do not want any more," and turned again to the wall.

On crawled the sluggish hours. Miss Fowke would have had her charge get up and shake off her drowsiness, and be conducted to her own room, but sleep, sleep, sleep was all her cry. "I have not slept for five whole nights," urged she; so there seemed some little reason why her waywardness should be put up with, and even a lap found for her heavy head, and excuses for the incoherent mutterings wherewith she interspersed her slumbers.

Thinking things over—one has a fine opportunity of indulging in that species of recreation when acting as sick nurse—Miss Fowke came gradually to the conclusion that of all the incongruities and monstrosities whereby she sat surrounded, the most purely enigmatical was Tryphena's declaration that this had come upon her because she did not go to Africa.

"Go to Africa!" reiterated Aunt Rachel, mentally, knitting up her brows—"go to Africa!" and felt quite weak. But she might be light-headed. Also, and that, unhappily, was not to be got rid of or disguised by any device whatever, the distinctly unfortunate

and reprehensible and even disgraceful character of Mr. Fowke's secret enterprise became more and more appreciable every moment that one dwelt on it. "He wouldn't say," pondered Aunt Rachel, gloomily, "where he got the money from. If he'd stolen it he couldn't have been closer. To-morrow, though, I'll have it out with him—of that I am determined. I'll know whose it was, and what it went for. I'm not going to be ruined blindfold."

To-morrow, quoth she,—shrill crew a cock to-day; Gran barked in the stables; some one, most likely John, passed up the lane; from the cowyard came the rattle and clang of milk-pails. Yes, again throbbed the bands, and flew the wheels, and thumped the pistons of this immeasurable, perpetual, stupendous machine called life. Oh, blessed night—oil for gaping wounds throughout the Universe, poured in by the hand of that Good Samaritan whose surname is Law—who has not hymned thy excellence, to whom hast thou not brought comfort?

Aunt Rachel, however, though usually as warm an upholder of the claims of rest as are

most actively-inclined persons—a stout paradox, but with its pinpoint of truth—was, on this special occasion, something less than smitten with poignant regret at the return of day. To squat on a bare floor, your legs doubled up, Turk fashion, your lap a pillow, unfettered action as impossible as though you were a heathen idol, or the leader of a party, is scarcely the most agreeable way extant of disposing of your nocturnal leisure.

"It is morning," said she, bending over Tryphena, who, lips parted, her cheeks a little pink, slept peacefully as a tired child.

But the girl slept on.

"My dear," said Aunt Rachel, giving her a slight shake, "you must let me get up. I hear the men in the yard."

Phenie sighed.

Untying her apron, the which she converted into a kind of bolster, and put under her head, Aunt Rachel, with a groan—she had not stirred a hair's breadth for hours—struggled up on to her feet.

"I will not be long," said she, and lamely—her right foot had gone to sleep, as if to spite and deride the rest of her weary body—left the room.

It was still dark indoors, though the outer world was wide awake. As she stole on down the creaking stairs, Aunt Rachel caught the sound of rain, sullen rain, scourging the windows with cruel steadiness, pouring from the eaves in little straight white streams like rods of quicksilver, peppering into the brimming water-butt; and with this came saddest harping of roused wind—wind which laying hold of the battered weathercock on the old dovecote caused that venerable biped to do severe and audible penance for all the false reports he had industriously circulated during the last hundred years, and shook mimic deluges out of ivy-bushes, and raced madly here and there, now roaring in a chimney, now rattling a door, now mysteriously inflating and creeping about under the loosened paper-hangings of damp walls. A grim and gloomy day, a day on which, under the most favourable of circumstances, it would be difficult, not being a seraph, or a successful débutant, or one newly married, to maintain a decent equableness of demeanour, but which, in the present aspect of affairs, must assuredly be eyed with——

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Miss Fowke, cutting a caper over something in the hall, a caper which all but sent her sprawling on the flags—"whatever's that! and turned back to see, aggrievedly. Had she not been "put about" enough?

Though the principal window was still shuttered, a faint semblance of light crept in through that over the door; a long look, and the mystery was solved. On her side, her four thin legs stretched out stiff and straight, her wide-open glazed eyes turned upwards as though in her last agony she had had a thought —that dogs do think is, I fancy, tolerably well known by now—of the tender soul in whose compassionate affection she had found the sole joy of her feeble days, lay Beauty, quite dead—dead and cold as the stones she lay upon.

Neglected, thrust into outhouses, dealt with below pretty much as one other loving, gentle, much-enduring friend of ours had been dealt with above, the old hound had on this, her last night, crept from among the worn-out pots and kettles, in company of which she had of late made her bed—she who never

was turned out, was always let to doze and dream by the warm hearth—into the kitchen, when Miss Fowke went to search for wood, and thence, being an hungered, and it may be troubled (she had been very uneasy ever since Tryphena's disappearance, indeed, that was why she was denied the house, Aunt Rachel was afraid that she was going mad), into the hall, where, strength failing her and God being good, she made her end.

A vague sense of discomfort vibrating in her mind—of course dogs must die, but they had had this one so long, and though the old creature was sometimes a worry, still one had got accustomed to her, and Gran was no good for the house; besides, she might have had those "bits;" perhaps she had gone rather short of late; she looked very thin—little better than skin and bones—but there was such a deal to be thought of, you could not remember everything;—just a little sorry that this had happened, I say, just a little doubtful as to why it had—whether, in fact, it might not have been as well to see that the poor beast was not left dinnerless, as well as kept in her place—Aunt Rachel hastened on

into the kitchen, intending to call Tapp to come and take the body away. She could be buried by Lady, her mother, under the plum tree—'twould do it good.

Clang fell the shutter bar.

In flowed the gray day over the sanded floor, the ash-strewn hearth, the uncleared table.

Miss Fowke paused.

She was surprised to find things so. When the master chanced to be down first it was his habit to light the fire.

And that he must be down by now was certain, for hark! the clock was just going to strike eight.

"Dear, dear!" said Aunt Rachel.

Another proof that Mr. Fowke had gone forth unto his labours came to light when she reached the door. It was unbolted, likewise unlocked. "I could never have left it so last night," she thought, growing more and more uneasy—why, she knew not, except that loss of sleep always made her feel queer—but she could not venture to be positive either one way or the other. Had you told her that she at the present moment stood on her head,

she would have considered before contradicting you.

Dully she looked out upon the rain. Tapp would be in the stable—that is, if one could venture to assume the legitimate whereabouts of any one—but you would get wet to the skin did you attempt to proceed thither in this downpour; and yet Beauty must be taken away. Dully she turned it over, when a gate banged, and some one—a man—ran quickly up the road.

That man was John—John, in hottest haste—John, his mouth open, his face the colour of his smock, but for the little red lines, like the rivers in a map, meandering over his cheeks—John plainly in direst trouble.

"What's the matter?" called Aunt Rachel, paling too.

"The maister!" he cried, stumbling on up the garden path.

"Well?"

"'E've been and 'anged 'isself—'anged 'isself in the apple'ouse! Oh Lord! I be fit to drop!" and therewith set his elbow against the wall, and leant his head on his hand, and gasped alarmingly.

Aunt Rachel laid hold of the lintel of the door. Her face reddened as from a blow.

On a sudden the air grew thick with noise of hoofs. A man mounted on a gray galloway rode at a sharp trot up to the gate. John turned and looked at him.

"Et's Muster Valoynes," said he; but Miss Fowke neither spoke nor moved.

Robert dismounted, and hooked his horse's bridle over the gate-post. He had come to make a last attempt at a peaceful settlement of differences—love being sweeter than Justice, or her better-half, Revenge.

But scarcely had he set his face towards the house—he fancied Miss Fowke looked extraordinarily grave—than some one else met his puzzled eyes, some one small and white, with a scarred mouth and loosened hair—some one quite fierce and crazed-looking.

"No," cried Tryphena, twisting her arm out of Aunt Rachel's quick grasp—"no; I heard John say it. I could not stay upstairs, I was afraid, and I found Beauty in the hall—"

"Go in!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, again laying hold of her.

"But father!" she cried. "It isn't true that— Oh, John!"

But John turned away. He could not bear to see her so.

"Tryphena," said Aunt Rachel, "control yourself. You have no father!"

And for a brief space she did control herself—for a brief space she stood mute and motionless; then she sank, not fell, just slid gently down on to the stones at Robert's feet, and the chill rain beat chilly down on her. She had nor sense, nor memory, nor knowledge any more.

CHAPTER XX.

"AS WATER-GRASS TO HERDS, IN THE JUNE DAYS."

OR weeks—nay, for a whole month and three days—did Tryphena lie 'twixt life and death.

Jacob Fowke's body having been examined by Dr. Sprague where it hung—that was on the beam, concerning the stoutness and antecedents whereof he made remark to Mr. Latchet on the preceding morning (Aunt Rachel sent off to the doctor at once, likewise wrote to the coroner at Robert's suggestion, he being well aware of the evilness of men's imaginations, and the difficulty of establishing innocence once aspersed)—these ceremonials being gone through with, I say, the corpse was removed after dark and in strict secrecy—the

Tapps alone knew what was doing—to the Shobdon Arms, there to await the inquest which would take place on the morrow, and which resulted in a verdict of "Committed suicide whilst in a state of unsound mind;" it being quite impossible, looking things well in the face, notably the depressed state of public affairs, the severity of the weather and prevalence of blight last autumn, for one dozen God-fearing and highly-respected rate and tax-payers to take any other view.

Two o'clock on Monday was the time fixed for the funeral, Aunt Rachel being feverishly anxious to get it over. "Nothing will go right till that's done with," said she to Robert, as they sat and talked on Sunday evening of things past, present, and to come; "I dare say you think me unfeeling, but I know it." And Robert said soberly that he trusted next week would bring a change;—he was thinking of one who lay sick and grievously tormented in a darkened room upstairs. But the voice that committed Jacob's body to the grave was not Acts Latchet's. He had left Coatham—gone no man knew whither, some said to London, others to Van Diemen's Land, but nobody felt

certain. On the afternoon of Thursday, he, having made a very good dinner—Mrs. Forbes fancying that he had looked vexed and worn at breakfast had spared no pains to prepare a tempting repast against his return—went upstairs for a short time, then locked himself into his study, then issued forth, put on his hat and cloak, and with a small black bag in his hand left the house, since which time he had not been heard of. On the study table was found a five-pound note, and a slip of paper on which was written :

"For Forbes, with grateful acknowledgments of the unremitting attention displayed by her whilst in my service.

"ACTS LATCHET."

Dicky Ludlow declared that, coming through the fields on Thursday morning he had seen the minister standing under the King's Tree, his hat at the back of his head, and his cloak all awry ; also that on catching sight of him he had picked up his stick, straightened his apparel, and walked away, quite like one who did not care to be seen ; also—but then no-

body ever paid any heed to what Dicky said, you know—that a big hole had been dug in the bank; but, as I say, nobody ever minded Dicky's stories, he saw angels where others only saw geese—there was no weight to be attached to what he chose to babble.

Still, Acts was gone, and Jacob was buried by the Reverend James Farebrother, minister of Chadlington, who it was rumoured might ultimately be translated to Coatham, should Mr. Latchet not return; an event the desirableness of which occasioned much discussion, and even interrupted the harmony of families, Mrs. Perkins actually refusing to sit next to Mrs. Chipper at the annual love-feast, because Mrs. Chipper had been heard to remark that at times she had fancied that he, Acts, had, of late, taken less pains about his discourses than he used to.

The "Terrible Occurrence at Shobdon" somewhat blunted in outline, and lowered from the dignity of longprimer to bourgeois and chance reference in a side column, Aunt Rachel began to feel a little more like herself, a little crisper, and better able to believe that the worst was over.

And indeed Tryphena, aided by Martha, than whom no more tender, untiring, and devoted nurse ever graced this earth, did begin to mend. For instance, when Robert paid her his daily visit in the morning (she was not strong enough to bear the sight of him twice in twenty-four hours), she would smile and put out her hand—such a thin little hand—and say, "I have slept so well," or "I have been dreaming of you," quite rationally, and then turn away her head—she could not well talk unmoved of her great good fortune even yet; and by degrees he came to sit with her of an afternoon just for half an hour before she had her tea, and he and Martha would talk and laugh, and she would listen and laugh too, until the pinkness of her cheeks and brightness of her eyes would proclaim the festivities to be at an end, for "if she is allowed to get excited," said Dr. Sprague, "I will not answer for the consequences; quiet is her sole chance—quiet and change presently, when she is able to bear it, and the weather gets milder." But day by day those sudden flushings grew less evident, the dear eyes got back more of their old

light; yes, the angels might fold their wings, they would not be wanted this time.

Trouble, nevertheless, was still in store. Aunt Rachel, poor woman, had not yet seen to the bottom of her peck.

When Mr. Fowke's monetary affairs came to be looked into by Messrs. Crabbe and Critchett, the firm of Dorchester solicitors who for years had conducted the family business, it was found that he had drawn on the moneys she had entrusted to his care to the extent of some fifteen hundred pounds. Why, it was impossible either to guess or ascertain, unless to further those maritime enterprises in which it now seemed from sundry facts which cropped up—as facts will when not of the slightest value—he had been engaged for some length of time. This would reduce her from modest ease to utter poverty—her entire fortune having been but three thousands pounds.

"I suppose," said she with a bitter smile, when made fully aware of her position, "that I shall have to turn needlewoman or matron at a public institution, or go as housekeeper to some old widower, for Phenie will have the house, and of course she won't want me stick-

ing about, neither would I be beholden to any one. It's a nice look-out;" and bit her lip hard.

The thought of earning her bread among strangers, of being no longer "Miss Rachel," but simply a very poor and quite homeless person, on whom it behoved all Christians to turn eyes eloquent of sympathy and compassion, was to this stern and unbending woman singularly appalling. No princess of the blood royal could more heartily loathe servitude, and yet she was neither fine nor proud—it was her nature.

Phenie, with the fine single-mindedness ot youth, could not imagine why she looked so sad, now that she was all but convalescent.

"I shall think," said she, with something like a pout—she was sitting up in bed, clad in a red flannel jacket, made pleasant with crimped white frills, like the frills she used to wear in her little black silk frocks and had you been able to put the two heads together—the head of the child of three and the girl of eighteen—you would not have found much difference; still the same shell-tinted skin, still the same pure brow, still the same

"lovely" look (there is no word that says what I mean half so well)—"I shall think," said she, "that you are not really pleased that I have made such haste to get well, and been so good and reasonable, and taken all the horrid pills and things. Why is it that medicine must be so nasty? food does one good, and food is excellent. By the way, that reminds me that I am hungry. Martha, bring my beef tea this instant—fly! But, aunt dear, why do you sigh so—why do you look so straight? Aren't you well? do you feel tired?"

"I do rather," was the subdued answer.

For to speak to this inquisitive being of anything calculated to alarm, wound, or perplex, was according to Dr. Sprague, just as good as "taking that knife"—he was eating plum cake at the moment of utterance—"and stabbing her right to the heart—to the heart. There was no doubt about it."

So Miss Imperious leant back on her pillows and smiled out at the February sunshine, and then sat up and ravenously devoured her broth, eating up every bit of the bread, and begging that she might have three slices of

meat for her dinner, and thought to herself that Aunt Rachel would be all the better for a change, and that it would be very nice at Weymouth, whither it had been fixed that she and Miss Fowke and Robert and Martha should simultaneously adjourn that day fortnight, in order that she might get quite thoroughly strong, and—and—well, I suppose was about as selfish and unseeing and deliciously contented as we most of us are when just out of the jaws of death.

There were times, though, when she was not quite so well satisfied, when the tears would run down her cheeks, and she would pull the clothes over her head, and be truly wretched. She was forced to do this in private, owing to all signs of agitation being as rigidly noted and severely criticized as though the first symptoms of some deadly and contagious disorder.

And these outbreaks and revulsions of sentiment were always occasioned by thoughts of "father." How he had met his death she did not yet know, all that happened subsequent to her incarceration in the attic being wholly obliterated from her memory, and no facts

having been supplied by either Miss Fowke or any one else to atone for the deficiency; it was, indeed, quite a matter of chance whether she would ever get at the rights of that miserable story, any more than Aunt Rachel would know why the dead man disliked Robert or the secret of his coalition with the minister—Robert would never tell her, of that I am certain.

"She has had trouble enough," said he to himself; "God forbid that I should add thereto—let the past pass."

How Jacob died, then, Tryphena had no idea. "He met with an accident," said Aunt Rachel; "It was quite sudden," asseverated Martha.

Nevertheless, that he was dead mixed sour with sweet and gloom with joy in no mean measure, and yet she could not blind herself to the fact that had he lived Robert might, nay, very probably would have gone unwed to his grave, which seeing the fervour and consistency of that young man's hymeneal inclinations, would have been, putting aside all personal considerations, a distinct calamity. All the same, and I cannot insist on this too

strongly, knowing Tryphena as I do, she did grieve heartily and inconsolably over her loss. That Jacob had dealt harshly with her—had indeed well-nigh dealt her clean out of existence—was, comparatively speaking, of little consequence.

"I dare say," said she to Aunt Rachel, one morning as that lady plaited her beautiful long hair into the two thick tails in which it was now let to hang day and night, "that I was exceedingly provoking. You always said I was obstinate, you know; and after Robert went away, I seemed to get so wicked, so very dreadfully wicked. Yes, I have no doubt but I had myself to thank."

But Aunt Rachel could seldom be got to take this view, even when particularly alive to small defects and weaknesses of character.

"Your father," said she, "was odd. No one ever got quite to the bottom of what he meant or intended. Mother used to declare he'd end in a lunatic asylum!"

"Grandmother," replied Tryphena, giving her head a little jerk, "must, I think, have been a very despondent old lady. She was always imagining horrors about some one."

"She was an honest woman," retorted Aunt Rachel," and could see a foot in front of her. You had better keep still or I shall hurt you."

What a day it was when our prisoner came out of prison! Robert volunteered to carry her downstairs, but she would have none of his officiousness.

"I can walk quite well," said she, red as any hip; "Martha will go before, so that if I turn giddy I may not topple over, and—no! go away. I do not want you!"

So, ruefully, he submitted, and down they went, Martha going before and he following after, and the Released between them, laughing and making their poor jokes like any three schoolgirls, down into the parlour, which had been smartened up for the occasion by the draping of the window with a pair of netted white curtains—netted by Aunt Rachel in her teens, and looked on as a kind of wedding garment, a sacred property, only to be brought out on the most solemn of feast days—and a bright fire, and a scarlet sofa rug. There was not a flower to be had for love or money. Robert rode over to Coatham,—Peter put back his ears and showed his teeth when he went

into the stable, the old horse missed his master, but saddled, he behaved well enough,—Robert rode over to Coatham, I say, on the preceding day and ransacked the entire town from one end to the other for a bunch of violets; he would have paid five pounds cheerfully for a tolerable rose, but no such thing was to be had; however, it all looked very cheerful, and the change was very pleasant, and the duck and apple-sauce and custard pudding and champagne—Robert's contribution to the banquet—exceeding good, and life warmed amazingly, "for I shall always have them to think about," thought poor Aunt Rachel, as she, with Martha, tidied the kitchen while *they* made fresh discoveries in the art of foolishness, "and that will turn the edge of things."

And Martha thought—

"I wonder 'ow faything and Tom 'll manage whilst I'm away? 'twould be well if Widder Bond could come and do for 'em; but 'twill be fine to see the sea."

And the sea she saw within seven days; the sea at play with her lover the sun, dazzling, bewitching, wonderful.

"Oh my!" said Martha, a great joy burning in her eyes—she was standing between Phenie and Robert, they having strolled out on to the Esplanade whilst Aunt Rachel unpacked the trunks (they had taken half a house for two months; at least Robert had taken it—it was all one, he averred)—"oh my," said Martha, "but 'tis like drinkin' wine out of a bowl."

Whereat they all laughed so heartily that one or two of the languid fine ladies and gentlemen, dotted about on the seats, or dawdling up and down, cane under arm or lapdog in chain—just as languid fine ladies and gentlemen do nowadays—turned and put up their eye-glasses and stared languidly and finely at them.

The man was good-looking, thought the Honourable Miss Blanc de Perles; and Sir Cheatham Wigge fancied that—er—if the gal—er—were—er—clothed, you know, she might not be so bad; but that creatcha with the scarlet hair, and mouth like the slit in a letter-box—good gad! La!

Not that the creatcha minded. Bless you, they didn't care twopence about the opinion of anybody; they had come to enjoy them-

selves, and be happy and good-tempered and comfortable, and enjoy themselves they did, and happy and good-tempered and comfortable they were; Robert getting up ever so early and walking away to a distant part of the beach, whither came no one but fishermen, and having a glorious swim and float and dive before breakfast, and then coming home to eat Homerically, and take Tryphena and Aunt Rachel (don't fancy she was allowed to feel lonely; why, her sayings kept them in laughing gear all day long, besides they loved her, and knew she was a little sad, and that alone was a sufficient reason why she should be made a great deal of by these silly young people)—take Aunt Rachel and Tryphena, I say, for a walk or to do shopping. Aunt Rachel thought it fit that Mdlle. La Fiancée should now be initiated into those mysteries of domestic economy which had hitherto been sedulously withheld from her, even as matters too fearful and wonderful for her to meddle with, and would take her to market and make her buy the dinner, and know that the fat of beef should be yellow and the fat of mutton white; likewise, that chickens' breastbones should end

in gristle, and ducks look yellow about the back. Robert would shout with laughter—you never heard such a laugh as this young man had at this period of his existence—as he stood by and heard these lessons. The very fishwives and market women would roar for sympathy; and Martha, Martha, would cry out:

"Lor', Miss Rachel, 'twill all come in time, jest like back teeth and other things; do 'ee let the poor child be."

And then, dinner being over—they kept to Grange meal-times and dined at one, as well as they could that was for merriment and nonsense—Robert would take Tryphena for a ride on a quiet pony he had picked out from the nags in a neighbouring livery stable, he himself being mounted on a long wiry beast, by name Juno, being a horse, and just like a dragon fly or a trainer's break, Phenie said, all head and no body to speak of. Aunt Rachel bought her a plum-coloured habit and a Spanish riding-hat, in which, with a lace cravat and white riding gloves, and a little riding whip mounted with a pointer's head in gold, which was of course "just the very

image of dear Beauty," this young woman looked—well, even the groom from the stables thought her a "wonderful sweet-faced young lady;" and they would amble gently up and down the country lanes, and sometimes dismount and have a look at any place of note which might chance to lie in their way, and, oh, they were so *very* happy.

"Surely," said Phenie one evening, as they stood—Aunt Rachel having gone to show Martha how to make a "macaroni cheese," as she called it, for supper,—in the embrasure of their great bow window, and looked out upon the calm gray sea, touched to silver by the soft kiss of the newly-risen moon—"surely," said she, laying her head against his shoulder, and speaking dreamily, as she so often spoke when they were quite alone, he being a second self, "God is Love. Why do people trouble about names and attributes when they have but to believe that and they will know everything?"

"Why did Eve pick the apple and bid Adam eat?" smiled Robert; "I am afraid as long as the world lasts man will not rest content with Paradise."

As yet nothing definite had been settled with regard to the wedding; they would be married and married soon, despite Tryphena being in mourning, the manner of Jacob's death having in Aunt Rachel's opinion slackened those fetters of custom in which she would otherwise have willingly consented to be bound; still, nothing was done. One day, however, a dressmaker took up her abode in a spare room, and parcels began to arrive with quite crushing assiduity, and it became plain that the end was at hand.

"Oh, mercy!" sighed Phenie, when Miss Fowke came to her for the sixth time in one morning to know if she really did not think she had better have a gray satin, "one would think I was not one girl, but forty. I could never wear out all the clothes you're getting me if I were to dress hard day and night for years."

"Pleugh!" ejaculated Martha, who was in her glory, and little short of delirious with draper's fever; "I'll warrant you'll want more before next Christmas. Why, you'll be asked everywhere. Yes, Miss Rachel, a gray satin, if you please, and a white ostrich

feather in that chip bonnet. Don't you recollect my saying that if I had my way you should——"

But our victim had fled.

"Robert," said she, flinging herself down on her knees before him—he was reading in the red arm-chair, reading "Kenilworth," and had just come to the part where Queen Elizabeth finds Amy Robsart dressed up as a wood nymph in the grotto—and catching hold of his hands, so that the book tumbled down upon the floor, and pressing them to her hot cheeks, "how do you like me best—I mean, what sort of a dress do I look least horrid in? a chintz or a muslin or a stuff, or a silk, or a——"

"A chintz, a chintz with a chocolate ground and big flowers all over it—like that you wore when I first saw you."

"There," said she, "I knew it," and sat down dejectedly; "aren't people idiots?"

I think it was the eighteenth of April—at all events I know that it was a Thursday, and Tryphena's birthday, and warm and bright and beautiful as a southern June, and that the orchards were white with blossom, and in the

gardens the blushing almond trees and the lilac bushes, long since green and now sprinkled with fast-purpling buds, and each goodly darling of the dainty spring made of your two eyes and your nose short cuts to heaven—that in a little not-much-frequented Wesleyan chapel situate on the outskirts of the busy town, whereof the ministrant was a benevolent-eyed, white-headed old man, who, having well-nigh lived out his simple life, would soon die a simple death, and be laid in a simple grave, among folks for the most part as simple as himself, Robert and Tryphena grew into man and wife quite quietly, with nobody but Aunt Rachel and Martha to keep them in countenance, and the old clerk, as whiteheaded as the parson, to say Amen.

They could forego grandeur, harbouring love.

And that morning, before any one was astir, Aunt Rachel had gone to Tryphena's room to take her a pearl brooch and pair of earrings as *her* wedding present, with perhaps a little good advice, and a few tears, and other oddments, if found room for, and Tryphena being, as might be expected, wide awake, moreover up

and peeping out behind her blind to see what sort of a day it was, was very much delighted and most grateful, and, in fact, quite ready to say and do everything that could be required.

Still the heaviness of Miss Fowke's countenance lightened not; still she evidently struggled with emotion.

"You are over tired," said Tryphena, gravely, regarding her with some anxiety; "you have been doing too much!"

"No," said Aunt Rachel, getting out her handkerchief—"no!"

"But, yes," affirmed our physiognomist; "you will be glad to get home again."

"Home!" echoed Miss Fowke; "where's that?"

"Why, *home!* The Grange, of course," quite surprised.

"You don't think I'm going back to Shobdon, do you?"

"Certainly! Where else should you go?"

Miss Fowke stood silent. Where else indeed.

"What do you mean?" pursued Tryphena; "what is all this? There is something in the

background. I have felt it for long, ever since I began to get well, indeed. What is it —what is it?"

"Why, you silly girl!" smiled Aunt Rachel —even through her tears,—there was something very comical about Phenie in a "taking" —"the Grange is yours!"

"Well—what of that?"

"Nothing! Except that I have no right there."

"No right!"

"No; and if I had, I have not the money to keep house with!"

Tryphena seemed to suffer.

"But," said she at length, "you have your three thousand pounds, and then there is what the place itself brings in; of course you would have to pay a bailiff just to collect the rents and that. Robert thought John might—"

"My dear," interposed Aunt Rachel, with a great sigh, "you are talking nonsense. The income drawn from the land belongs to you."

"Well," said Phenie, "and do you suppose that while I've got a sovereign you shall want half a one? Aunt Rachel—Aunt Rachel!" breaking from her indignantly, and dashing

away angry tears—"you make me quite ashamed of you."

"But," said Miss Fowke, "reason's reason."

"Let it be," retortedt he girl passionately; "I hate it. You go back to Shobdon and you live there, and if you ever mention money or house or land to me again, I'll repudiate you; I give you my word," bursting into tearful, tremulous laughter. "I'll repudiate you. Why, I never heard of such a thing, and after all your goodness——"

"But," broke in Aunt Rachel, "I have not been good to you always. No, fair play's a jewel—I have *not* been good to you always, and——"

"I don't care!" exclaimed Phenie, "God has given me Robert, and I will do as I please," and then she put her arms about Aunt Rachel's neck and kissed her first on one cheek and then on the other, and then on the mouth, just as she used to kiss Beauty, and then buried her face in her bosom and cried a little—and so Miss Fowke's future was decided.

And Martha?

Martha, having thrown old shoes at a de-

parting travelling carriage, in a fashion which excited the astonishment even of advanced Weymouth, and drank the bride and bridegroom's health quite as often as was good for her,—dear Martha, dear, jolly, wholesome, uncompromising creature,—and cried till her little red brown eyes were the size of my canary's,—packed the trunks and journeyed back with Aunt Rachel to Shobdon as blithe —well, as blithe as she well could be, seeing that——but they had promised, nay, vowed, sworn, that they would come south at Christmas; and it had been very pleasant—very.

"Fayther!" said she, when she had let John out of her arms, and Tom had sneaked off, not knowing quite what to make of himself, "I never enjyed anything so much in my life, and as for *them two*—well, theer; words can't explain it."

"Nay," said John, "thet I'll be bound!" and chuckled expressively.

He had always liked Robert.

It did not take long to effect such slight changes as were necessary to maintain the equilibrium of things under a fresh dispensation. Before a month had elapsed the Tapps

had removed from their tumble-down cottage into one nearer the Grange, likewise in good repair. John was known to possess all but supreme authority over his brethren, and Martha had become personal attendant on Miss Fowke in so far as was compatible with due performance of home duties. But Fate had not yet played out her pranks. With harvest came a new nine days' wonder.

Widow Bond got a lodger—a warm-looking, foxy-faced, six-foot-high gentleman, who said that he came from Crediton, and had a sister married in Coatham, and was looking about for a bit of land, having just come into something not unlike a fortune, owing to an uncle of his having gone out to America and made money, and come home "a shadder."

And by degrees it got to be known that Martha Tapp and this prosperous and stalwart person were "keeping company," with John's consent and Miss Fowke's approval, amid, in fact, the general acclamations of all who knew them—including even those living at a distance and of exalted station. And the corn carried, and the last rick thatched—the warm-looking gentleman nearly broke his neck by executing

a somersault therefrom in the excess of his emotion—these two were married, Martha turned into the wife of a British freeholder and Mrs. Charles Cornelius; and when Mr. and Mrs. Valoynes revisited Shobdon—not at Christmas as they had promised, owing to circumstances, but in the following June—the first thing that—but——

It is time for us to bid good-bye, my friends—five friends, five dear, never-to-be-equalled, quite best friends.

Good-bye!

THE END.

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